THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

THE FRANCIS BLAKE AFFAIR

Jean Van Hamme **Ted Benoit**

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

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AT THE TIME THIS NEW STORY BEGINS, AND WHILE LONDONERS ARE ENJOYING THE WARMTH OF AN EXCEPTIONALLY SUNNY MONTH OF JUNE, ALARMING NEWS REACHES THE EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY AS THEY HURRY TO THEIR OFFICES.

Breaking news! After his arrest, a spy reveals the existence of a network of foreign agents on British soil!

Get your Daily Mail! Is there a "mole" within the Intelligence Service?

AT THE SAME INSTANT, AN IMPORTANT MEETING IS BEING HELD AT THE SEAT OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE.

This time, gentlemen, enough is enough...

COLONEL DORIAN CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE I.S., IS GIVING FREE REIN TO HIS BITTERNESS...

We have been attempting to bring down this blasted network for months, with absolutely no success to this day.

... UNDER THE ATTENTIVE GAZE OF THE HONOURABLE HAROLD DOYLE-SMITH, UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AT THE HOME OFFICE AND IN CHARGE OF COORDINATING THE VARIOUS POLICE FORCES, AND OF POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR CHARLES GARRISON, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCOTLAND YARD.

But now that the press has — God knows how — managed to stick its nose into this case, we will soon be the laughingstock of the Kingdom.

I need results, gentlemen! And quick results at that!

WITHOUT LOSING COUNTENANCE, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, CHIEF OF MI5 — COUNTER INTELLIGENCE — CALMLY ANSWERS HIS SUPERIOR.

You are aware, Colonel, that uncovering this network has become the number-one priority of my department...

Unfortunately, every time we think we have the beginning of a trail, the rascals manage to vanish entirely, as if they had been mysteriously warned of our intentions.

Captain Blake, are you implying that this idea of a "mole" in the I.S., which I thought was a complete fantasy, could in fact be grounded in truth?

That is a possibility we cannot dismiss, alas, Mr Under-Secretary. It's probably nothing more than a series of unhappy coincidences; but it is indeed possible that a well-placed person among us is warning these foreign agents of our plans.

BLAKE'S WORDS ARE FOLLOWED BY A HEAVY SILENCE, BROKEN BY THE REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

This is a very serious suspicion, gentlemen. And one that could prove costly to our government if it turned out to be true. Didn't the man you arrested give you any information on the subject?

IT IS NOW THE TURN OF DAVID HONEYCHURCH, BLAKE'S DEPUTY, TO SPEAK.

This man, who goes by the name Larry Jennings, is just a "courier", sir. He refuses to speak, but we doubt he knows much. I'm sure you know how well compartmentalized these spy networks are.

We captured him as he was coming to pick up a message from a "dead drop" we'd identified: the base of a statue in St James Park. But before that, two of my agents managed to take pictures with a telephoto lens of everyone who came close to the statue. It is possible, even likely, that one of these people will be our "mole."

What on earth is a "dead drop", Honeychurch?

It's professional jargon, sir. It refers to any non-descript spot agreed upon in advance, where a secret agent can leave a message: a loose brick in a wall, a hole in a tree, or, as in this case, a crack in the base of a statue in a public park.

What happened to these pictures you took, David?

Unfortunately, the film was damaged due to a handling error. The lab technicians are trying to get something out of it, but I'm afraid they have little hope.

You are definitely unlucky, my friends. I'd therefore suggest that you question this Jennings again. And this time, I will personally follow the interrogation. This man must tell us everything he knows.

It is vital that we bring down this spy ring with all due haste, gentlemen. The Home Secretary holds this case in special importance, because it touches not only our Nation's prestige, but also its security. Good day, gentlemen.

The message seems clear. Colonel, it goes without saying that the Yard's people are at your disposal if you need them.

Thank you, Sir Charles.

WITH THE MEETING OVER, COMMANDER WILLIAM STEELE, CHIEF OF MI6 — FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE — WALKS UP TO BLAKE.

Well, my dear colleague, looks like you have your work cut out for you.

You said it!

Is it true you've already lost an agent in this business?

Unfortunately, yes: Fielding, one of my best men. He disappeared a week ago while trying to infiltrate this damned network.

I must confess that I fear the worst about this.

It is the risk that all of us soldiers of the shadows run, old boy. And that's something those egghead politicians will never understand. Good luck, Blake. You'll need it!

THAT SAME EVENING, BLAKE MEETS HIS OLD FRIEND PROFESSOR MORTIMER IN ONE OF THE CENTAUR CLUB'S SITTING-ROOMS.

Hello, Francis! If the newspapers are right, I gather you're not about to retire any time soon.

Tell me about it...

Your sherry, sir.

The last thing we needed was for the press to get a hold of this story... Thank you, James.

Your health, Francis. So, what about this infamous "mole"...?

Sorry, Philip, but that's a topic I don't have the right to broach, not even with you. Cheers!

I understand. But please be so kind as to shed light on something for me: how is it possible to establish a spy network in a country with borders as well protected as ours?

Simple: by using sleeper agents.

Sleeper agents?

Men and women sent by a foreign country, who immigrated completely legally. They settle down all over the country, very often receive British citizenship, and keep banal, everyday jobs for years without attracting any attention... Until the day they're needed for a very particular mission.

They are then "activated", as we say in the business. They receive their instructions according to a prearranged code, ready to serve their country of origin unquestioningly in an espionage or subversion operation. Such agents could number in the thousands, Philip. And it's impossible for us to detect them while they remain inactive.

It's frightening! But aren't there also some British- born citizens among those spies?

Well... yes, indeed, which complicates matters further. Unfortunately, it does happen that some of our countrymen become traitors, out of ideological conviction, self-interest, or any other reason.

Like your "mole" within the I.S.?

It's not been proven that there is one, Philip. You see, the difficulty in uncovering such networks is that the members don't know each other. Each of them only has one or two contacts and receives or sends his instructions using a procedure that changes regularly. Following such a trail is like spooling a thread that can break at any time.

And what worries me most in the case I'm dealing with is the feeling that this network has "activated" an unusual number of "sleepers." As if the enemy was getting ready for a big move.

What do you mean?

BUT THE CLUB'S BUTLER INTERRUPTS BLAKE'S EXPLANATIONS.

Dinner is served, gentlemen.

Excellent, James. Lead on!

AND THE TWO FRIENDS HEAD FOR THE DINING ROOM.

Enough espionage talk, old boy. I must say I need to clear my head.

All right, Francis. I promise not to touch on that topic again.

AN HOUR LATER, AFTER AN EXCELLENT MEAL PLEASANTLY ACCOMPANIED BY A 1947 POMEROL, BLAKE SEEMS TO HAVE SHAKEN OFF THE STRESS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS.

But you, Philip, look rather cheerful to me. Could you perchance have any holiday plans?

SMILING, MORTIMER TAKES A SMALL LEAFLET FROM HIS POCKET AND HANDS IT TO BLAKE.

Almost, dear fellow, almost... Take a look at this!

Ardmuir Castle

Ardmuir Castle! Blimey! Don't tell me you're thinking of buying a castle?

Ha! Ha! I doubt my lowly salary as a researcher would let me do so! No, this is the place where a scientific conference I was invited to will be held next week.

You lucky man! And where is this Ardmuir Castle?

In the Upper Highlands, in Northern Scotland, along the West coast. A beautiful spot in June. The castle has been rented by Adrian Deloraine for the event.

Deloraine? Let me see... That name seems to ring a bell...

You must have heard of him. He's a rich businessman, an art lover and a fanatic for scientific research. He's a major financial contributor to the C.S.I.R.*, where I work, and had the idea of gathering the twenty best physicists of the Kingdom for an exceptional brainstorming session. I must confess to being excited at the prospect of checking in with my eminent colleagues on the status of our respective projects.

Will the gentlemen have coffee in the smoking room?

No, thanks. If you don't mind, Philip, I'd rather go home. Tomorrow will be another long day.

To tell you the truth, going to bed early wouldn't do me any harm either.

A SHORT WHILE LATER, THE TWO FRIENDS ARE CHATTING AS THEY STROLL ALONG A PICCADILLY SIDEWALK.

What lovely weather!... And what about you, Francis, no holidays in sight? I'd say you richly deserve some time off.

I doubt the phrase exists in MI5's vocabulary, old boy.

But if I could get away for a few days, I know where I'd escape to: my cousin Virginia's, in Yorkshire. She's been inviting me over for so long...

Ah... I didn't know you had a cousin...

I have several, like everyone else. But this one has the advantage of owning a lovely half-timbered cottage on the outskirts of Seanberry village, along the Swale... HEY, TAXI!

COMING FROM REGENT STREET, A TAXI HAS STOPPED AT BLAKE'S CALL.

An ideal spot to hide from your problems, believe me... 99 Park Lane, driver!

Yes, sir.

4

*Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research.

THE NEXT DAY, JENNINGS, THE CAPTURED SPY, IS INTERROGATED IN THE I.S. OFFICES IN THE PRESENCE OF COLONEL CARTWRIGHT, UNDER-SECRETARY DOYLE-SMITH, COMMANDER STEELE AND CAPTAIN BLAKE. BUT THE HANDCUFFED MAN STUBBORNLY REFUSES TO SAY A WORD.

For the last time, Jennings: who were you going to give that message to?

JUST THEN, A LAB TECHNICIAN ENTERS THE ROOM AND HANDS BLAKE'S DEPUTY A THICK ENVELOPE.

Thanks, Stanley.

FACED WITH FAILURE, HONEYCHURCH CHECKS IN WITH HIS SUPERIORS.

It's obvious he's scared. We won't get anything from him.

If only he hadn't had time to destroy the message he came to get, we'd have had a chance to learn more.

We must get him to talk. Simple courier or not, this man has to have some contacts within his network.

AND ONCE THE MAN IS GONE...

Good news, gentlemen! It seems that the lab managed to get something out of the film I told you about yesterday, after all.

CLASSIFIED

QUICKLY, HONEYCHURCH SETS UP A ZOOM-EQUIPPED PROJECTOR AND POINTS IT TOWARDS THE SCREEN COLONEL CARTWRIGHT IS ROLLING DOWN THE WALL...

... WITHOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO BLAKE WHO, SUDDENLY SEEMING VERY NERVOUS, HAS POSITIONED HIMSELF BEHIND THE PRISONER.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE MI5 AGENTS, OF VERY POOR QUALITY, FLICKER ONTO THE SCREEN.

There! This shape leaning towards the base! It looks like it's slipping something inside!

It could be our man, indeed. I'll try to zoom in.

AT MAXIMUM ENLARGEMENT, A HUMAN SHAPE APPEARS ON THE SCREEN, STILL BLURRY AS HONEY-CHURCH FOCUSES THE IMAGE...

... WHICH RESOLVES, TO GENERAL ASTONISHMENT, INTO THE FACE OF CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE!

?

?!

!?

!?

THUNDERSTRUCK, THE FOUR MEN TURN TOWARDS BLAKE — WHO, STRANGELY, SEEMS TO LOSE ALL COUNTENANCE...

Heavens, Blake!

I... I don't understand... This... This is ridiculous...

By the devil, Blake! What is the meaning of this!?

BUT BLAKE, USUALLY SO SELF-ASSURED, BECOMES MORE AND MORE FLUSTERED.

It... The picture's of poor quality... It must be a look-alike...

After all these years, I'd be inclined to believe you, old boy...

... UNDER HIS COLLEAGUES' ACCUSATORY GLARE.

Could it be that YOU are the traitor who keeps the enemy agents informed?!?... I cannot believe that...

... I'd rather not take any chances. Steele! Honeychurch! Place Captain Blake under arrest!

Sorry, Captain, but...

Stay where you are, David! Don't touch me!

AS HIS DEPUTY ATTEMPTS TO GRAB HIM...

Sorry, gentlemen! I'd rather not have gone to such extremities, but the circumstances don't leave me with much choice. Hands in the air, and back off!

??

?

Don't be stupid, Blake. You won't go far!

We'll see about that. Get up, Jennings! We're leaving!

?!?

AND, FOLLOWED BY THE COMPLETELY BAFFLED PRISONER, BLAKE RUSHES OUT OF THE ROOM AND LOCKS THE DOOR AFTER HIMSELF.

THEN THE MEN RUN DOWN THE STAIRS.

Hurry! That door won't hold them back for long!

INDEED. FURIOUS, HONEYCHURCH BLOWS THE LOCK AWAY WITH A COUPLE OF SHOTS...

BANG

BANG

... AND RUSHES TO THE STAIRCASE.

CAPTAIN! COME BACK! YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE!

BLAKE'S ONLY ANSWER IS TO FIRE A SHOT TOWARDS HIS DEPUTY.

BANG

The devil!

HAVING REACHED THE YARD'S COURTYARD WITH JENNINGS STILL IN TOW, BLAKE LOCATES A POLICE MOTORCYCLIST ABOUT TO RIDE OFF.

HEY! YOU!

Official emergency, my man! I need your car!

But...!?

STOP THESE TWO MEN! THEY'RE SPIES!

What the...!?

BUT BLAKE DOESN'T GIVE THE UNFORTUNATE POLICEMAN TIME TO REACT.

Hop on, Jennings! Quick!

OW!

AT THE SAME INSTANT, HONEYCHURCH COMES OUT OF THE BUILDING.

VROOOM

VROM

BANG

BANG

THE GATE! CLOSE THE GATE!

?

!

VROOO

BUT BLAKE PUSHES THE BIKE TO THE MAX AND ZIPS THROUGH THE GATES OF THE YARD BEFORE THE DUMBFOUNDED SENTRIES.

?

BEFORE THE POLICEMAN BOWLED DOWN BY BLAKE HAS TIME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM, AN ENRAGED HONEYCHURCH COMMANDEERS HIS BIKE...

Hey!? What are you doing!?

... AND DIVES INTO WHITEHALL'S TRAFFIC IN HOT PURSUIT OF THE ESCAPEES.

BUT BLAKE HAS SEEN HIM...

Hang on, Jennings!

... AND MAKES A SHARP TURN AT THE CORNER OF WHITEHALL PLACE...

... TO FIND HIMSELF ON VICTORIA EMBANKMENT, ALONG THE THAMES, HONEYCHURCH STILL FOLLOWING.

LONDON TRANSPORT

THAMES RIVER TRIPS

SUDDENLY, AHEAD OF HIM, THE BRIDGE STREET LIGHT TURNS RED!

WITHOUT HESITATION, BLAKE RIDES THROUGH THE CROSSROAD AT MAXIMUM SPEED.

HONK

HONK

You madman!

Hooligan!

E.M. BLYTH SONS LTD MILLERS WITHAM

SCREEE

HIS PURSUER IS ABOUT TO FOLLOW SUIT WHEN A BUS APPEARS IN FRONT OF HIM!

?!?

BRAKING DESPERATELY, HONEYCHURCH MANAGES TO AVOID A COLLISION...

SCR EEEEE

AS HE STANDS UP, UNHURT BUT HIS FACE TWISTED WITH FURY, THE YOUNG MI5 AGENT CAN ONLY LOOK ON HELPLESSLY WHILE HIS QUARRY ESCAPES INTO THE DISTANCE.

KEEP LEFT

BUT HE LOSES HIS BALANCE, AND HIS BIKE FALLS FLAT AND SLIDES ON BEFORE CRASHING INTO A ROAD SIGN.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, AT THE C.S.I.R. IN THE SUBURBS OF LONDON, PROFESSOR MORTIMER, WHO IS HEAD OF THE NUCLEAR PHYSICS DEPARTMENT, RECEIVES SOME UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

Sorry to bother you, Professor, but there are two policemen here asking to see you.

Me? Very well, I'm coming.

Are you Professor Philip Mortimer?

Yes, indeed. What can I do for you, gentlemen?

We're to take you home immediately, Professor. Chief Inspector Kendall is waiting for you there.

Kendall?!? At my home?!? But... has something happened!?

We don't know. We were just told to come here and get you as fast as possible. Our car is outside.

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, MORTIMER, CONFUSED, LEAVES THE RESEARCH CENTRE IN THE POLICEMEN'S CAR...

... AND FINDS HIMSELF, FORTY MINUTES LATER, IN FRONT OF HIS HOUSE, WHERE TWO BOBBIES ARE ON SENTRY.

JUST THEN, CHIEF INSPECTOR GLENN KENDALL COMES OUT THE DOOR, ACCOMPANIED BY TWO STRANGERS.

Ah, Professor! At last!

Good grief, Kendall, what's happened!? Was there some accident!?

I... Erm... These gentlemen will explain...

Professor Mortimer? I am Colonel Cartwright, director of Intelligence Service...

And this is David Honeychurch, Captain Blake's deputy. Or, rather, I should say: his former deputy. Let's go upstairs, shall we?

??

MORTIMER FREEZES ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE FLAT HE SHARES WITH BLAKE, ASTONISHED.

GOOD HEAVENS!?!

INDEED, THE COMFORTABLE LIVING-ROOM WHERE THE TWO FRIENDS HAVE GATHERED THE NUMEROUS SOUVENIRS OF THEIR TRAVELS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN AT THE CENTRE OF A HURRICANE.

FURIOUS, MORTIMER TURNS TOWARDS THE I.S. MEN.

What is the meaning of this intolerable violation of privacy, gentlemen!? This is England! I demand an explanation!

The latest issue of the Daily Mail will provide it, Professor. You can expect a surprise...

The surprise will be yours, friend, once I lodge a complaint with your superiors...

??!??

NO. 18,114 THREE HALFPENCE FOR QUEEN AND COM

HEAD OF THE MI5 UNMASKED

TROUBLING PRECEDENTS

'his case cannot elp but evoke he still fresh motions caused the defection

CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE ESCAPED WITH THE SPY ARRESTED BY HIS OWN DEPARTMENT TWO DAYS AGO

It was in rather spectacular circumstan

An E care

Hero of World W guished

HORRIFIED, UNABLE TO BELIEVE HIS OWN EYES, MORTIMER DROPS INTO A CHAIR.

This isn't April 1st, Professor. Go on, Honeychurch, tell him.

It's... I... That's not possible... This is a joke, isn't it?

IN A FEW WORDS, THE MI5 AGENT RECOUNTS WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER THAT DAY IN THE I.S. OFFICES. BUT MORTIMER HARDLY SEEMS TO HEAR HIM.

You understand now why we had to search your apartment? Unfortunately, we didn't find anything that could help us.

Excuse me, but I need something strong...

SOMEWHAT SHAKY ON HIS LEGS, MORTIMER POURS HIMSELF A WHISKY AND DOWNS IT IN ONE GULP.

THEN, HAVING RECOVERED A CALM DEMEANOUR, HE TURNS BACK TOWARDS THE POLICEMEN.

Your story simply doesn't make sense, gentlemen...

I've known Blake for years... There isn't a more loyal servant of the Crown. Remember the Swordfish, the Yellow Mark*, the case of the Great Pyramid**...

Until this morning, I believed as you do, Professor...

But 25 years spent in the intelligence community have taught me to never trust appearances. And the facts are there, indisputable.

Facts, too, can be deceiving, Colonel...

The only plausible explanation for this ridiculous affair is that Blake acted UNDER COMPUNCTION. I am convinced that by using hypnosis, or any other such method, your opponents have found a way to DIRECT HIS ACTIONS!

10

*See The Yellow M. **See The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Parts 1 and 2.

An ingenious idea, Professor. But one which, unfortunately, doesn't hold water.

Doesn't it, now? And why is that, pray tell?

Because we have just discovered that, several months ago, Captain Blake opened an account with the Jersey Bank Ltd under an assumed name. An account that periodically received transfers from an anonymous account in the Bahamas.

During that time, Blake regularly withdrew cash from this account. For a total of 30,000 pounds sterling. The cashier identified him from a photograph.

30,000 pounds?!?

But that's a massive amount!

Over ten times his yearly wages, as a matter of fact. Do you still believe your friend Blake acted "under compunction", Professor?

I... I don't understand... Why would he have needed such a sum?

Blackmail? Gambling debt? Simple greed?... We'll find out sooner or later. But it proves that you never know your friends quite as well as you'd think. Do you have any idea where Blake could be hiding?

No... Of course not...

Too bad, but we'll catch him eventually. Every seaport, every airport has been alerted. He can't leave the country.

Don't be so sure. Francis is clever. He won't make things easy for you.

Captain Blake is the most cunning agent I've ever had under my command, Professor. But a hunted man cannot hope to elude every law enforcement agency in the Kingdom forever.

Of course, I'd be grateful if you didn't leave London without letting Chief Inspector Kendall know.

Do you mean I'm a suspect?

Blake shared this apartment with you. And you are his closest friend. He may try to get in touch with you.

I doubt it. He's much too smart to make such a mistake.

COLONEL CARTWRIGHT ANSWERS WITHOUT HESITATION.

If we manage to arrest him, he will be tried for high treason. If not... It is out of the question that the man who knows all the secrets of our counter-intelligence be allowed to defect to the enemy, Professor. If we cannot take him alive, we will eliminate Captain Blake!

We shall see. From now on you are under surveillance, Professor. Good evening, and please forgive us for the untidiness of your apartment.

One moment, Colonel! What will you do if... if you manage to find Blake?

THAT SAME EVENING, WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER INVITES THE HOME SECRETARY, SIR GEOFFREY BANNISTER, TO HIS RESIDENCE AT 10 DOWNING STREET FOR AN INNER CABINET MEETING ABOUT THE BLAKE AFFAIR...

... AT THE I.S. HEADQUARTERS, COLONEL CARTWRIGHT HAS GATHERED A CRISIS COUNCIL...

You take temporary command of MI5, Honeychurch. You will personally lead the search, in liaison with Scotland Yard and the MI6 operations branch. You have carte blanche, but I want Blake dead or alive.

... AND IN SCOTLAND YARD, SIR CHARLES GARRISON IS GIVING HIS LAST INSTRUCTIONS.

Roadblocks on all the major arteries, Kendall! And I want every suspicious vehicle searched, no matter how much gridlock that creates!

MEANWHILE, LEFT ALONE IN HIS RANSACKED APARTMENT, MORTIMER IS LOST IN WORRIED THOUGHT...

Could he have been pressured somehow?... But giving in to blackmail is just not like him at all... Ah, my dear Francis, what kind of sad trouble did you get yourself into?

... UNDER SCRUTINY FROM TWO YARD INSPECTORS WHO, FROM THEIR PARKED CAR, ARE KEEPING THE HOUSE UNDER SURVEILLANCE WITHOUT BOTHERING TO HIDE THEMSELVES.

I'd say that with all that's happened, our esteemed professor will have trouble sleeping.

As much as we'll have staying awake. I long for tomorrow morning and our beds!

HAVING POURED HIMSELF ANOTHER WHISKY, MORTIMER TRIES TO PUT SOME ORDER BACK INTO HIS THOUGHTS.

No, I simply cannot believe it. I've known Blake for too long — it's just inconceivable that he would sell himself to a foreign power.

I'm convinced he'll reappear in a few hours and give a perfectly good explanation for this crazy story. Rather than worry myself sick, I'd better sort out the mess these gentlemen left behind.

BUT AS HE SETS ABOUT PUTTING HIS PRECIOUS COLLECTION BACK IN ORDER, A STRANGE DETAIL SUDDENLY CATCHES HIS EYE.

?

GOING TO A BAKED CLAY REPRODUCTION OF A SUPERB 11TH CENTURY TOLTEC "CHAC-MOOL," HE EXAMINES IT CLOSELY.

This crack around the neck... I'm certain it wasn't there before...

Sure enough... It looks like the head was cut off, then carefully glued back on.

Is this a coincidence?... Never mind, I just have to be sure!

HOLDING THE STATUETTE BETWEEN HIS KNEES, MORTIMER ENDEAVOURS TO REMOVE THE HEAD...

... WHICH POPS OUT SUDDENLY!

HE THEN PUTS HIS HAND INTO THE CHAC-MOOL'S HOLLOW INTERIOR...

... AND PULLS OUT A WAD OF BANKNOTES!

OH, MY GOD!

FRANTICALLY, MORTIMER LIFTS THE STATUETTE ABOVE HIS HEAD AND HOLDS IT UPSIDE DOWN...

Thirty thousand pounds! The 30 pieces of silver! He didn't have time to take it with him... Cartwright was right after all!

Then... Blake really is in danger! If he doesn't surrender, the men of the MI5 will try to shoot him! Lord have mercy! I must find him before they do! But find him WHERE, by Jove!? WHERE!?

THEN HE REMEMBERS THE INNOCENT REMARK BLAKE MADE THE PREVIOUS NIGHT: "AN IDEAL SPOT TO HIDE FROM YOUR PROBLEMS, BELIEVE ME..."

His cousin Virginia's cottage in Yorkshire! What if Blake gave me a kind of "message" in case something like this happened?

It's probably a ridiculous idea, but I have no other lead. Let's see... If memory serves, there's a train to the north that leaves King's Cross Station at 22:53...

I've time to catch it. But how to get rid of my "guardian angels" first?... Ah, I may have an idea...

A FEW MINUTES LATER, AFTER PUTTING THE MONEY BACK IN ITS HIDING PLACE AND GLUING THE CHAC-MOOL'S HEAD ON, MORTIMER PICKS UP THE PHONE.

Hello, Rowley's Catering?

HIS CALL IS INTERCEPTED BY SCOTLAND YARD, WHO HAVE TAPPED HIS LINE...

Two slices of roast beef "en croûte" with side dish and a half-bottle of Bordeaux... Very well, sir. Our delivery man will be with you in ten minutes.

... AND IMMEDIATELY TRANSMIT THE INFORMATION TO THE POLICEMEN ON "STAKE-OUT"...

Acknowledged, thank you.

Roast beef "en croûte"! Worrying doesn't seem to hurt his appetite, anyway!

I hope it works! I just have time to prepare a few things.

TEN MINUTES LATER, A CATERING VAN STOPS IN FRONT OF 99 PARK LANE.

There's the delivery man, as promised!

Mr Mortimer? Rowley's Catering.

Very good, lad, come in.

Put it on the table — and don't mind the mess. Tell me, lad, how would you feel about earning 10 pounds?

10 pounds?! Blimey, that's a tidy sum! What do I have to do for it, my Lord?

Did you notice he had a scarf on?

A...!? Oh, good grief! Don't tell me he's trying to pull that one on us!

And there's the delivery man coming back out.

Say, Jim...

Hey, you, wait a minute!

BUT INSTEAD OF OBEYING THE POLICEMAN'S ORDER, THE DELIVERY MAN TAKES OFF AT FULL SPEED.

STOP!

STOP!

STOP HIM!

SUDDENLY, THE RUNNING MAN CROSSES THE BUSY STREET AND MAKES STRAIGHT FOR HYDE PARK.

THE TWO OFFICERS TRY TO FOLLOW, BUT...

LOOK OUT!

!?

JUNE

AFTER HAVING CROSSED AT LAST...

Damn it! Where did he go!?

JOSTLING ASIDE THE PEOPLE STROLLING ON THIS MILD EVENING, THE TWO MEN RESUME THE CHASE...

... AS THE DELIVERY MAN ACCELERATES ALONG THE PARK'S ALLEYS...

THERE HE IS!

... ONLY TO STOP A LITTLE FURTHER AND SIT ON A BENCH, APPARENTLY OUT OF BREATH.

Running so hard in this weather isn't good at your age, Professor.

You can take off this scarf now — you didn't really expect us to fall for such an old trick, did you?

BLAST IT!

REALISING THAT THEY HAVE BEEN DUPED, THE TWO POLICEMEN IMMEDIATELY RUSH BACK.

GROSVENOR HOUSE

Phew! He's still there! He didn't have time to run!

I'll believe it when I see it! Come on, let's make sure!

RESPONDING TO THE MEN'S IMPERIOUS RINGING, MRS BENSON, THE LANDLADY, OPENS THE DOOR.

Police! Take us to Professor Mortimer's apartment, quickly!

Again? But I...

We said quickly!

AND SO, SHORTLY THEREAFTER, HAVING MADE MRS BENSON OPEN THE APARTMENT DOOR FOR THEM...

The devil! He fooled us completely!

AT THE SAME TIME, MORTIMER, WEARING A FELT HAT AND A LIGHT RAINCOAT, CALMLY EXITS THE "TUBE"* AT KING'S CROSS STATION.

KINGS CROSS

My Goodness My GUINNESS

OXO

Nestlé

THEN, HAVING PURCHASED HIS TICKET WITHOUT ATTRACTING ANY ATTENTION, HE JOINS THE CROWD OF TRAVELLERS BOARDING THE TRAIN TO EDINBURGH THROUGH DONCASTER, YORK, DURHAM, NEWCASTLE AND BERWICK.

The Daily Mail! All the details on the Blake Affair! The Daily Mail!

AND, HAVING THE GOOD FORTUNE OF FINDING AN UNOCCUPIED 1ST CLASS COMPARTMENT, HE SETTLES DOWN COMFORTABLY AS THE TRAIN ROLLS OFF, UNAWARE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE IN WHICH HE IS ABOUT TO FIND HIMSELF.

16

*London subway

WHILE THE "FLYING SCOTSMAN"* TAKES MORTIMER TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN...

... AND THE UNFORTUNATE DELIVERY MAN IS GETTING A VERY HARD TIME INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD...

But I keep telling you it was just a prank!...

A prank that could cost you dearly, my lad!

... SPECIAL AGENT HONEYCHURCH AND CHIEF INSPECTOR KENDALL ARE GIVING THEIR RESPECTIVE SUPERIORS A SUMMARY OF THE LATEST EVENTS.

The professor couldn't have left London by car — he'd have had to be intercepted at one of our check-points.

That leaves the train...

Why not by plane?

There are too many control points in airports, and Mortimer knows that. Disappearing into the anonymous crowd of a train station is a much surer way of staying out of sight.

Send some detectives on board every train that's left London in the past hour, Kendall. We're bound to get our hands on him. And not a word to the papers, obviously.

Should we arrest him if we find him?

Absolutely not!

Accomplice or not, Mortimer probably knows where to find Blake. By following him discreetly, we can kill two birds with one stone.

Speaking of Blake, still no leads?

None, Colonel. But you know as well as I do that these spy rings have very well organised escape routes. Our best chance to catch the captain, therefore, is to find Professor Mortimer.

I wish you good fortune, gentlemen. Otherwise, I won't give a penny for your heads... or mine. And now, if you'll excuse me...

AT THAT MOMENT, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN, TWO SHAPES ARE CREEPING ALONG THE SQUALID STREETS OF THE EAST END...

17

*The London-Edinburgh express

... BEFORE STOPPING AT THE CORNER OF SHAD THAMES AND ST SAVIOUR'S DOCK.

BISTO for the GRAVY

... AND A POSTAL VAN STOPS AS IT DRAWS NEAR.

Jennings? Let's hurry up. Every cop in town is on the warpath.

KRT 613

A FEW SECONDS LATER, HEADLIGHTS FLASH A SIGNAL THROUGH THE SEMI-DARKNESS OF THE AREA, DESERTED AT THIS LATE HOUR...

Get inside the empty bags you'll find at the back, and hide among the mail bags. We have a long road ahead of us.

AFTER CLOSING THE BAGS IN WHICH THE TWO MEN ARE HIDING, THE FAKE POSTMAN CONTINUES ON HIS WAY WITHOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO THE LARGE SEDAN THAT DRIVES OFF AFTER HIM, ITS LIGHTS OUT.

LESS THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, AT THE EDGE OF LONDON ON THE WATFORD ROAD...

POLICE

A roadblock! Not a sound, not a move!

Hello! What are you transporting back there?

What do you think is transported in a postal van, Sergeant? Tomatoes?

Sorry, mate, but I have to check. You're working quite late, I say...

Night delivery. This mail must be at the Northampton Sorting Centre before 4AM.

KKT 613

BUT AS THE SERGEANT IS GETTING READY TO CHECK THE MAILBAGS, HE HEARS THE SOUNDS OF A HEATED ARGUMENT BEHIND HIM.

?

I'm telling you to let go of me, you damned cops!

What's going on over there?

You have no right to treat me like this!

This man refuses to show us his ID, Sergeant.

CAR PARK
SHARP RIGHT

I'm an American citizen! I'll file a complaint with my embassy!

American or Patagonian, you must respect the laws of the country you are in, sir.

Hey, Sergeant!...

What about me, then? I'm going to end up being late.

All right, then— you can go.

AND AS A SLIGHT SMILE OF COMPLICITY APPEARS BRIEFLY ON THE "AMERICAN CITIZEN'S" FACE...

... THE POSTAL VAN DRIVES ON INTO THE NIGHT.

MEANWHILE, MORTIMER, WHO HAD DOZED OFF, IS SUDDENLY AWAKENED BY THE TRAIN BRAKING TO COME INTO A STATION.

?

FLYING SCOTSMAN
No 4900

!?

PETERBOROUGH
35

The Peterborough marshalling yard!! This train doesn't usually stop here. What does this mean?...

IRELAND
BY
AL AND SEA
EP YOUR WAY
N COMFORT

19

AFTER TURNING THE LIGHTS OFF IN HIS COMPARTMENT, MORTIMER CAREFULLY OPENS HIS WINDOW A NOTCH.

Baines, Fowley, you'll start with the rear carriage...

... Johnson and I will take it from the front.

Yes, sir.

Do you remember our man's description?

Red beard, cowlick and bow tie... If he's on this train, we can't possibly miss him.

REALISING THAT EVERY SECOND COUNTS, MORTIMER QUICKLY GRABS HIS SUITCASE...

... AND RUSHES OUT INTO THE CORRIDOR AS THE EXPRESS GETS UNDERWAY.

BUT AS HE MAKES HIS WAY TOWARDS THE FRONT OF THE TRAIN...

Sorry to bother you in the middle of the night, ladies and gentlemen... Identification, please!

BACKING OFF HURRIEDLY, THE PROFESSOR OPENS A DOOR ONTO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLATFORM...

... AND, CLOSING IT AFTER HIM, JUMPS ONTO THE TRACKS WITHOUT HESITATION.

Blimey! Better not put down roots here...

SIDLING BETWEEN THE BOGGIES OF THE MERCHANDISE TRAINS PARKED ON THE SORTING TRACKS, MORTIMER WALKS AWAY, UNSEEN, FROM THE PLATFORM LIGHTS.

I'm really too old to play the outlaw on the run. The problem is that this is only the beginning... How on earth will I keep going now?

Bit of bother with the police, Commodore?

?!?

LIKE A GHOST OUT OF THE NIGHT, A STRANGE CHARACTER APPEARS BEFORE A STUNNED MORTIMER.

Mind you, it's not really any of my business... I'm not too fond of them coppers either...

Who... Who are you?

Arnold Willoughby the Third at your service, Commodore. Professional traveller for the past forty years. May I ask, beggin' your pardon, where d'you plan on goin' like that?

Er... Yorkshire, if possible.

Then I'd advise this one: the 405-22B, bound for Newcastle and departin' in twenty minutes. As a matter of fact, I was plannin' on boardin' it too. Come summer, I do like the birds: I head north.

N.B. 98"

SLIGHTLY WEARY, THE PROFESSOR DECIDES TO FOLLOW HIS UNEXPECTED GUIDE.

Are you certain this train goes through York?

As sure as there's twelve pence in a shilling, Commodore.

LNER 2195

In forty years I've learned the timetables for all the merchandise trains of the Kingdom. Come on, get in quick before one of those damned brake-squeezers shows his mug around these parts...

AT THE ANNOUNCED TIME, THE MERCHANDISE TRAIN HAS LEFT THE MARSHALLING YARD, CARRYING MORTIMER AND HIS STRANGE TRAVELLING COMPANION.

You can open for a spell, Commodore. We won't be stopping before Selby...

WITH RELIEF, THE PROFESSOR OPENS THE WAGON'S SLIDING DOOR.

Stinks, don't it?

It's a cattle car... So, of course it don't smell of roses. It may be less comfortable here than in a first-class Pullman, but at least here there's no conductor to punch your ticket.

When does this train reach York?

Tomorrow around noon. Say, Commodore, you wouldn't have a bit of honest whisky in your luggage, by any chance? With this heat, my throat's as dry as a banker's heart...

SMILING, MORTIMER HANDS WILLOUGHBY A SMALL SILVER FLASK HE HAD TAKEN THE PRECAUTION OF PUTTING IN HIS SUITCASE.

Here, my friend, I owe you that much...

Ah, tasty! Twelve years old, at least, and I know my whisky...

?

Well, I think I'll get some shuteye. You should really do the same.

Good night, Commodore.

BUT, UNABLE TO FIND SLEEP, THE PROFESSOR LETS HIS MIND WANDER...

In what adventure have I landed this time? I hope my intuition is correct... If not, God only knows where and when I shall see poor Francis again.

... NOT SUSPECTING THAT AT THIS VERY MOMENT CAPTAIN BLAKE IS MUCH CLOSER TO HIM INDEED THAN HE COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

62387

HAVING DRIVEN ALL NIGHT, THE VAN CARRYING BLAKE AND JENNINGS GOES THROUGH A QUIET VILLAGE IN THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN...

E. DAVIS & SON

WILLEY'S CUT GOLDEN BAR

... TO TAKE REFUGE FINALLY IN THE UNDERGROUND GARAGE OF A MANOR NEARBY.

ROYAL MAIL E R

THE DOOR IS IMMEDIATELY CLOSED BY TWO MEN ARMED WITH HUNTING RIFLES.

Very good, Jimmy, just on time! Any problems?

None. The "American" played his role to perfection. I'll take care of my passengers.

THE PRETEND POSTMAN QUICKLY UNTIES THE BAGS HOLDING THE TWO FUGITIVES.

Phew, it's about time! I thank you for the trip, friend, but I've known more comfortable means of travel.

Welcome to the Templeton residence, Captain Blake. Hand me your gun, if you please...

?

BLAKE RELUCTANTLY GIVES THE STRANGE BUTLER THE SIDEARM HE HAD KEPT. THE MAN'S FACE SEEMS FAMILIAR TO HIM, YET HE CANNOT REMEMBER EXACTLY WHERE AND WHEN HE'S SEEN HIM BEFORE.

THE NEXT MOMENT, USING THE HORRIFIED BLAKE'S PISTOL, THE MAN COLDLY SHOOTS POOR JENNINGS TWICE IN THE HEART.

HAAAAA!!

THE DEVIL!!!

BLAM

BLAM

Dead!... But why?

You wretch! I recognize you now: You're the assassin who tried to kill me at Athens Airport*...

Correct, Captain...

And if you don't behave, good old Jack will be delighted to give it another try. But with much better prospects for success, this time.

OLRIK!?!

*See The Mystery of the Great Pyramid.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, A FEW HUNDRED MILES AWAY...

Wake up, Commodore!

Huh!? What!? What is it!?...

We're almost at York... Maybe you'd better get off before we reach the station.

Er... Yes, indeed, quite right.

Just before the station, there's a bend where the train will slow right down. You can jump then.

All right.

Mr Willoughby, I'd like...

Keep your money, Commodore. The pleasure of the company of a gentleman like you was enough. Especially a gentleman who goes around with such good whisky.

Well, in that case... Thank you for your help, Mr Willoughby. And safe travels!

The same to you, Commodore. May St George watch over you!

Now!

S 71043Z

?

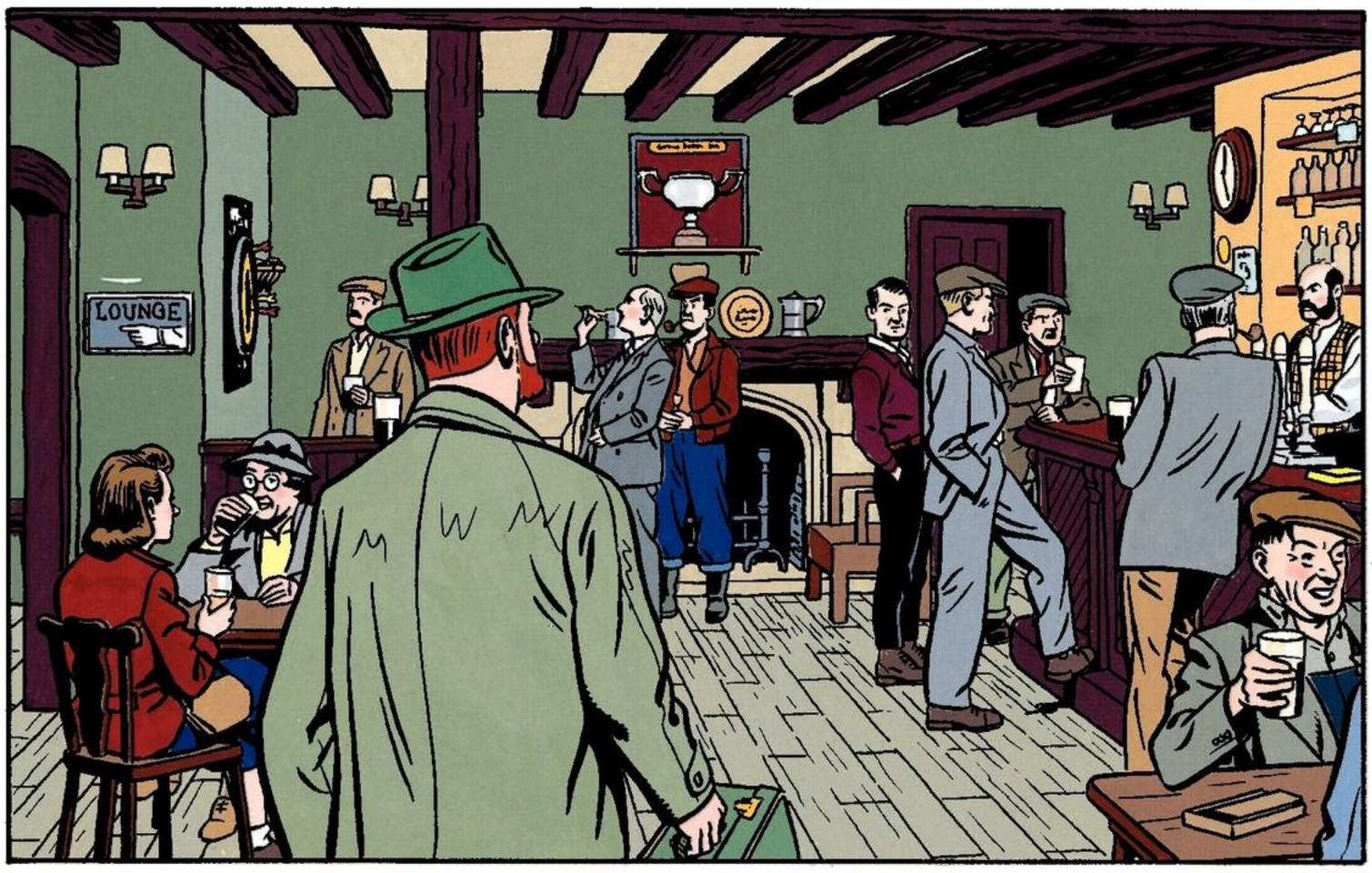
Damn! Pure Shetland trousers, brand new!... If I'm to continue travelling in this manner, I'll seriously have to practice jumping off a moving train...

A FEW MINUTES LATER, AFTER CHANGING HIS TROUSERS, MORTIMER ENTERS THE OUTSKIRTS OF YORK JUST AS A STEADY DRIZZLE STARTS FALLING.

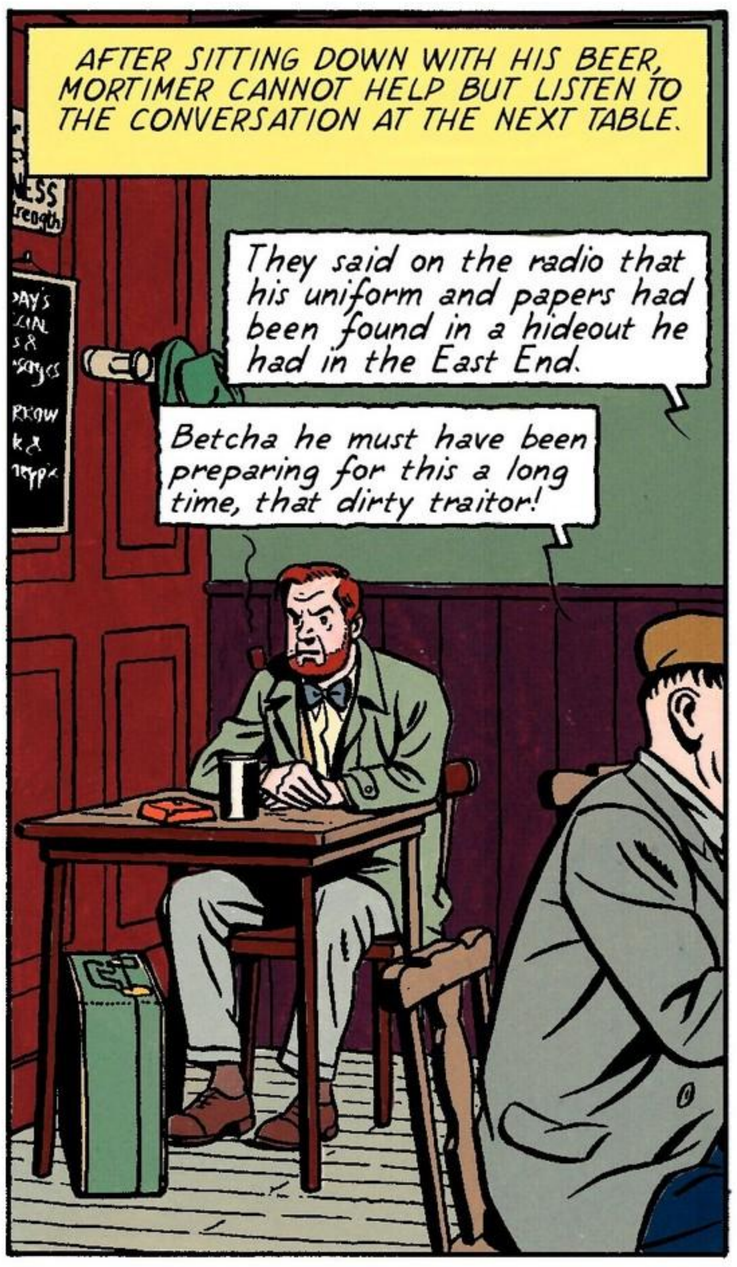
BLACK SWAN INN.

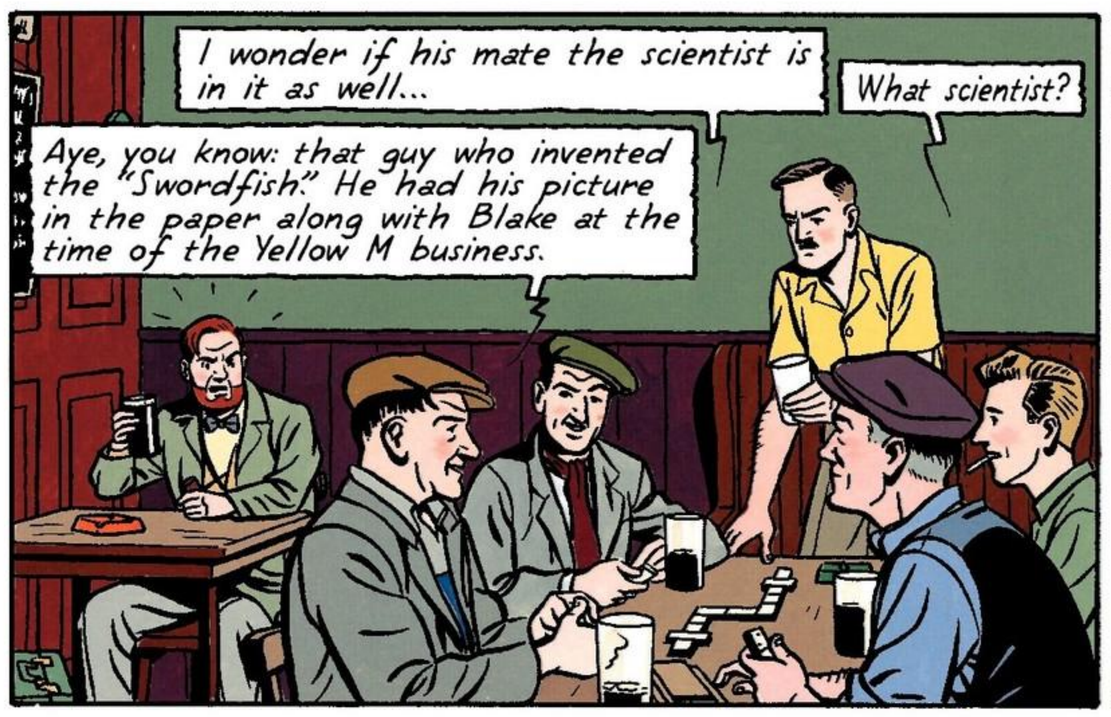
It may not be very prudent, but I'm too hungry. I'm going inside.

BLACK SWAN INN.

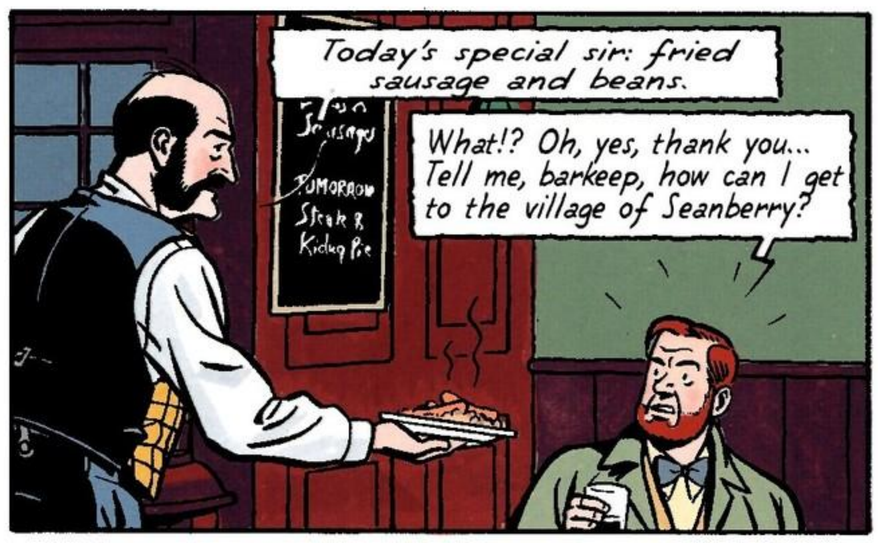

LOUNGE

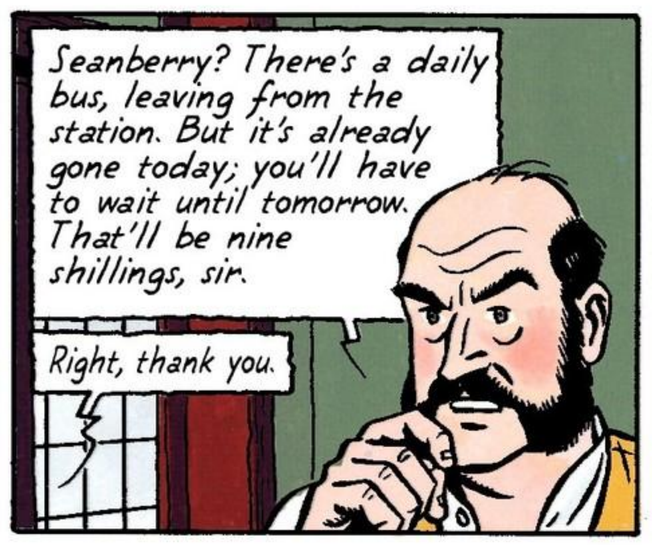
Ugly weather out there, isn't it... What'll it be?
Today's special and a pint of ale, please.

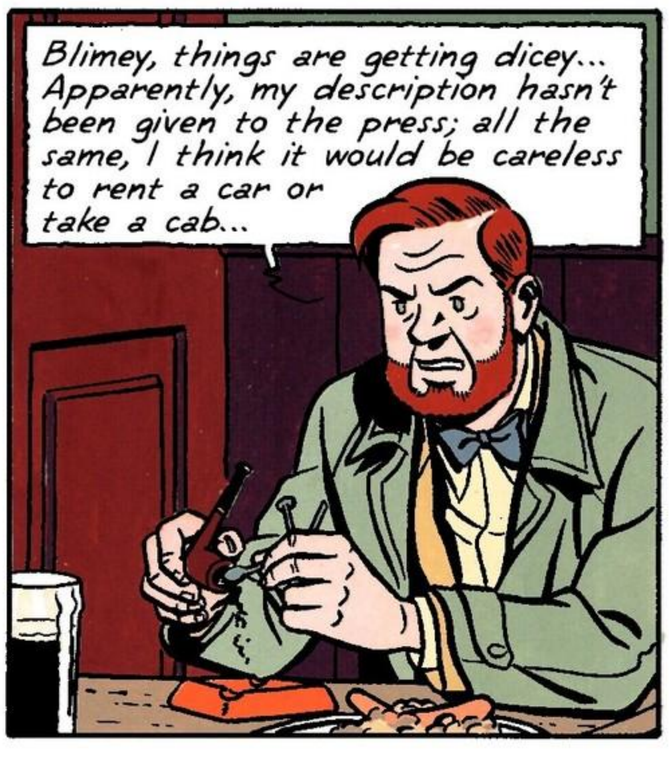

AFTER SITTING DOWN WITH HIS BEER, MORTIMER CANNOT HELP BUT LISTEN TO THE CONVERSATION AT THE NEXT TABLE.
They said on the radio that his uniform and papers had been found in a hideout he had in the East End.
Betcha he must have been preparing for this a long time, that dirty traitor!

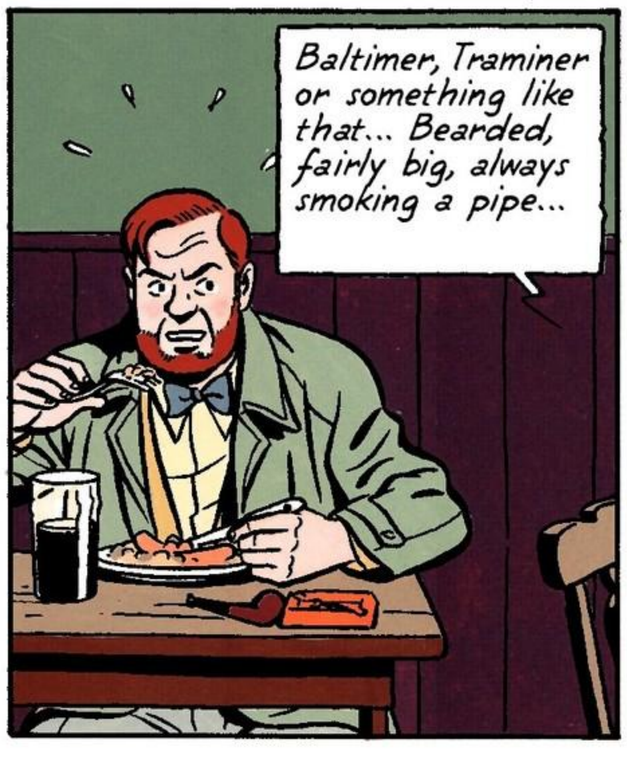

I wonder if his mate the scientist is in it as well...
What scientist?
Aye, you know: that guy who invented the "Swordfish." He had his picture in the paper along with Blake at the time of the Yellow M business.

I hear they're always together, them two.


Today's special sir: fried sausage and beans.
What!? Oh, yes, thank you... Tell me, barkeep, how can I get to the village of Seanberry?
TOMORROW Steak & Kidney Pie


Seanberry? There's a daily bus, leaving from the station. But it's already gone today; you'll have to wait until tomorrow. That'll be nine shillings, sir.
Right, thank you.


Blimey, things are getting dicey... Apparently, my description hasn't been given to the press; all the same, I think it would be careless to rent a car or take a cab...


Baltimer, Traminer or something like that... Bearded, fairly big, always smoking a pipe...

I betcha him and Blake are working for the other side!
Aye! A hemp necktie or a dozen bullets, that's all that kind of scum deserves!
TODAY'S SPECIAL

GIVING UP ON LUNCH, MORTIMER GETS UP RIGHT AWAY.

Damn! And there lies the bad side of being famous: You get sentenced before your trial. Better not stick around these parts.

TOMORROW Steak & Kidney pie

Double six!

BUT AS HE EXITS THE PUB...

TOWER ALES

?!?

FULLY LICENSED

WINES SPIRITS

AAAHH!!

Tell me, lad, haven't you ever been told it's forbidden to cycle on the sidewalk?

I'm sorry, sir, I... I didn't see you...

Mmh, I'll let it pass this time... But, tell me, isn't this bicycle too large for you?

It's my father's old bike, sir. In my house, we don't have enough money to buy me one of my own.

If I gave you ten pounds for this one, I'm sure you could buy one your size, right?

10 pounds!?! Cor! With that I could even get one with a racing handlebar and three gears!

A SHORT WHILE LATER, THE DEAL CLOSED TO THE SATISFACTION OF BOTH PARTIES, THE PROFESSOR RIDES AWAY ON HIS NEW PURCHASE, HIS SUITCASE SECURELY FASTENED TO THE LUGGAGE RACK.

MOWBRAY ALES

ONCE OUT OF TOWN, HE CHECKS THE ROAD MAP HE HAD HAD THE FORESIGHT OF TAKING WITH HIM.

Blimey! Another 25 miles to Seanberry. With this rain, it's not going to be so charming.

WHILE MORTIMER BRAVELY CYCLES ALONG YORKSHIRE'S NARROW ROADS ON AN EMPTY STOMACH...

... BLAKE, FAR AWAY, WAITS ON TENTERHOOKS IN THE ROOM IN WHICH HE HAS BEEN LOCKED.

26

I should have guessed that brigand Olrik was part of this. This is going to be tougher than I'd thought.

Stay where you are and avoid all unnecessary moves, Captain...

MEANWHILE, MORTIMER...

At last... None too soon — I'm soaked.

The colonel would like to invite you to dine with him tonight and had this prepared for you. It should be your size.

Perfect. Thank the colonel for this thoughtful attention.

At least with this rain, my arrival will go completely unnoticed. There isn't a soul in the streets.

PUBLIC TELEPHONE

SEAWBERRY POST OFFICE

A half-timbered cottage on the outskirts of the village... It's got to be this one.

BEFORE GETTING ANY CLOSER, MORTIMER CAREFULLY HIDES HIS BICYCLE BEHIND THE BUSHES THAT LINE THE ROAD. THEN, SUITCASE IN HAND, HE HEADS FOR THE COTTAGE'S ENTRANCE.

Either I'm utterly mistaken and I'll get away with feeling silly, or... Enough dithering: Onwards!

BED & BREAKFAST

IN RESPONSE TO THE BELL, SOMEONE OPENS THE DOOR IMMEDIATELY.

Professor Mortimer, welcome! You're just in time for tea.

??

Mrs Wingrave CAMPBELL

MEANWHILE, BLAKE, HAVING CHANGED CLOTHES, IS ESCORTED TO THE TEMPLETON RESIDENCE'S MAIN SITTING-ROOM.

Come in, my dear captain, come in! Did you manage to get a little rest?... No?... Ah, well...

Would you like a dash of sherry before dinner? I understand sherry is your favourite aperitif...

Enough with the niceties, Olrik. Why did you have Jennings killed?

Because he was "burnt", my dear fellow. Therefore, he'd become useless to us. Useless and dangerous.

But the funny part is, he was shot with your own gun—something Scotland Yard will easily discover. That now makes you not only a traitor, but a murderer as well.

You rotten scoundrel!

Always with the big words!... Are you quite sure you won't have anything to drink? Well, here's to your health, and that of all soldiers of the shadows!

There is a third reason: Once the police find Jennings' body on the other side of the country, they'll focus their attention over there, and not here, which will give us more breathing space. Shall we have dinner, now? You must be very hungry...

SOON THE TWO MEN ARE SITTING ACROSS FROM EACH OTHER, WHILE JACK SERVES DINNER.

What exactly is your role in this affair, Olrik?

The same as yours, my dear Blake. Are we not both intelligence professionals?

When a foreign power, which shall remain nameless, asked me to help set up a spy network in Great Britain, obviously I accepted. It amused me greatly to have you as an adversary, even if you didn't know it...

Because you did not know, Captain Blake! Just like you knew nothing of our activities and projects. Who were you hoping to dupe with that ridiculous attempt at passing for a traitor?

28

I'll admit the idea was bold, if a tad too classic. You become a "traitor" and, thanks to that idiot Jennings, you hope to follow the thread up the network. But, bad luck, you find me. And I know you too well to swallow your story, Blake.

You're but a link in the chain, "Colonel"...

It's your network's commander himself who contacted me.

Indeed? And who might he be, this big boss?

I don't know. Any more than you do, most likely.

Obviously, he wasn't naïve enough to introduce himself. Our contacts took place through anonymous phone calls and dead drops. And some discreet transfers to a bank in the Bahamas.

It was all for money, then... I didn't think of you as so greedy, my dear fellow.

Everyone can change, Colonel. And, there comes a time in life when one wishes to be paid what one is worth. Isn't that the position YOU have always held?

It is. But you'll need more than that to convince me...

What proof do you have to offer?

Haven't you been warned, for the past year, of every operation the I.S. has launched against your network? And haven't these warnings been transmitted to you directly by your boss each time?

That's true. And it would be you who...?

As the one in charge of counter-intelligence, wasn't I the best man for this? Just recently, I allowed you to uncover one of my own men who was trying to infiltrate you...

Fielding, yes, indeed... Well, there's a perfect opportunity to gauge your sincerity, my dear fellow. Come with me; we shall have dessert afterwards.

ESCORTED BY THE FAKE BUTLER, OLRIK LEADS BLAKE INTO THE HOUSE'S CELLARS.

An interesting and brave young man, this Fielding. If a bit uncooperative for my taste.

What did you do with him? Where is he?

?!?

Here. We're keeping him fresh until he's ready to talk.

29

Hello, Fielding! How are you feeling, old boy?

Is... Is that you, Captain!? Have... Have you come to get me out of here?

Don't count on it, my boy...

?

It would seem your commander has decided to switch sides. Jack, give me the captain's pistol...

We've left a single bullet in the magazine, Captain. If you wish to prove to me that you're not bluffing, you know what you have to do.

You... You want me to...!? ... But that's atrocious!

Now that you're here with us, we no longer need the information Fielding could give us. Whether he's shot by you or by Jack won't make a difference to him. But it will make a world of difference to you, my dear Blake.

HORRIFIED BY OLRIK'S ODIOUS BLACKMAIL, BLAKE TURNS TOWARDS THE UNFORTUNATE PRISONER AS THE COLONEL LEAVES THE CELLAR WITH A SNICKER.

Captain! You... You're not going to do this!?

Sorry, old chap, but I don't have a choice!

I give you two minutes, not a moment more!

You think he'll do it?

I don't know. That's what makes this experiment interesting.

NO, I BEG YOU, DON'T...

BLAM

AH...

A MOMENT LATER, THE DOOR OPENS ON BLAKE, WHITE AS A SHEET, HIS SMOKING GUN IN HAND.

It's done!

Well, that settles that! Welcome among your new friends, Captain Blake!

BLOODY HELL!

OW!

BUT, QUICK AS LIGHTNING, OLRIK HAS DRAWN HIS PISTOL FROM UNDER HIS SMOKING JACKET.

I should have known. But you made a mistake, my dear fellow... Your weapon is empty — unlike mine.

30

JUST THEN, FIELDING, WITH THE LAST OF HIS STRENGTH, LEAPS ONTO THE "COLONEL."

??

THE TWO MEN ROLL TO THE GROUND AND...

BANG

Too bad for you, Blake! I wanted to keep you alive, but...

Not so fast, you rascal!

OUCH!

CONCENTRATING ALL HIS RAGE INTO HIS FIST, BLAKE KNOCKS OLRIK OUT WITH A MASTERFUL RIGHT HOOK.

THEN HE RUSHES TO THE SIDE OF HIS GRAVELY WOUNDED AGENT.

Fielding, are you all right?

I've... I've had it, Captain. I hope you catch all of these bastards.

You're going to make it, old chap! I'll get you out of here and to a hospital, I promise.

Scotland... I heard them... speak of... Scotland...

JUST BEFORE LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS, THE WOUNDED MAN WHISPERS ONE LAST SENTENCE IN BLAKE'S EAR.

The man... with six fingers... Beware... the man with... six fingers...

AFTER RAPIDLY DRESSING FIELDING'S WOUND WITH HIS SHIRT, BLAKE SEARCHES THE STILL UNCONSCIOUS OLRIK.

A passport in the name of Archibald Templeton... A driving licence in the same name... Well, I'll be!

BRITISH PASSPORT

TEMPLETON

Ardmuir Castle

F 312144

MR. ARCHIBALD TEMPLETON

Castle

Isn't this where Mortimer was supposed to attend a physics conference? Hey, what's this?...

ON THE BACK OF THE LEAFLET, THREE MYSTERIOUS WORDS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN RED.

BRIANSTAD

SA

SAMHRADH

31

AFTER HAVING LOCKED OLRIK AND JACK INSIDE THE CELLAR, BLAKE, CARRYING FIELDING OVER HIS SHOULDER, CAREFULLY MAKES HIS WAY BACK TO THE MANOR'S GROUND FLOOR.

IN THE MAIN LIVING-ROOM, THE GUARD IS PATIENTLY WAITING FOR OLRIK'S RETURN, WHILE...

... IN THE KITCHEN, THE FAKE POSTMAN DOES JUSTICE TO THE DINNER PREPARED BY THE GANG'S COOK.

AND ON THE GROUNDS AROUND THE HOUSE, MORE GUARDS ARE PATROLLING WITH SOME UNFRIENDLY-LOOKING DOGS.

Unless...

Good grief! Getting out of here won't be easy. Alone I'd probably have a chance, but with poor Fielding...

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER...

Wait a minute... Yeah, something's burning!

WHEN THE GUARD OPENS THE DOOR TO THE HALL...

GOODNESS, GRACIOUS!

ALARM! FIRE!

??

?!?

What's going on? Where's the boss?

He went down to the cellars with Jack and the English officer. The house is on fire! We have to call the fire brigade!

Certainly not, you idiot!

IT'S OLRIK WHO, FOLLOWED BY JACK, HAS MANAGED TO BREAK FREE FROM THE CELLAR WHERE BLAKE HAD LEFT HIM.

Do you really want them to find the weapons and the postal van in the garage?

But, boss...

No "but"! Get the cars ready and tell the others: We have to be gone from this house in fifteen minutes.

And what do we do about Blake?

We'll take care of him later.

LESS THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, THE MEMBERS OF THE GANG PILE HURRIEDLY INTO TWO POWERFUL CARS, WHILE FLAMES BILLOW FROM EVERY WINDOW OF THE LARGE MANOR.

We'll meet again, Captain Blake! And your life will barely be worth enough to pay the bill I'll bring you that day!

WITH THE CARS GONE, BLAKE STANDS UP FROM BEHIND THE BUSHES WHERE, IN THE GENERAL CONFUSION, HE'D SOUGHT REFUGE WITH THE STILL UNCONSCIOUS FIELDING.

Well, it looks like the way is clear. My turn now to get out before a well-meaning neighbour calls the fire brigade.

33

MEANWHILE, IN SEANBERRY, UNAWARE OF THE DRAMATIC EVENTS BLAKE IS EXPERIENCING, MORTIMER FINISHES THE EXCELLENT DINNER PREPARED BY HIS HOSTESS.

It's been a long time since I've eaten so well, Mrs Campbell. Would it bother you if I lit my pipe?

Not at all, Professor. My husband smoked a pipe as well.

He fought in the war in the Macran Levy Corps, under Captain Blake. He was killed in the battle of the Strait of Hormuz, when the Swordfish's secret base was attacked.

You were there, I believe?

Indeed. It is thanks to men like your husband that we now live in a free world, Mrs Campbell. You can be proud of him.

So you're not really Francis' cousin?

Captain Blake has several "cousins" across the country, Professor. "Cousins" who do not appear on any official Intelligence Service roster.

So you work for Blake. But why are you so sure that he didn't really turn?

He'd been preparing this operation for over a year. What we call in our jargon "disinformation." Very few people knew.

Sleeper agents, you might say.

One has to use the opponent's weapons, right? We serve as "waypoints" during especially delicate secret operations, as is the case with this one.

Who?

I'm not authorized to tell you. Don't forget that the goal of this mission is not only to bring down the spy network, but also to identify the REAL traitor within the I.S. And this traitor has to be someone high up in the hierarchy.

I understand. Do you know where Blake is hiding now?

No. I've informed my "contact" of your arrival and will receive new instructions tonight. Come, I'll show you to your room.

People in the village know that I run a bed and breakfast to pad my widow's pension. They're used to seeing me put up passing travellers.

Won't your neighbours wonder at seeing you offer hospitality to a stranger?

One last question, Mrs Campbell... I had the feeling you were waiting for me... Am I right?

Your coming here was planned from the beginning, Professor. Captain Blake knew that when the time came, you'd understand his "message."

He's playing a very dangerous game and you are the only person he can trust absolutely. He's going to need you.

I see. Well, good night, Mrs Campbell.

Good night, Professor. And please, call me Virginia. I'd like that; after all, don't we have a friend in common?

NOW ALONE IN HIS ROOM, MORTIMER ATTEMPTS TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE STRANGE SITUATION IN WHICH HE FINDS HIMSELF...

AT THAT MOMENT, A DETECTIVE BURSTS INTO THE OFFICE.

We've got news, boss! And it's big! Jennings has been found in Kent! Dead!

Dead?! How?

... WHILE IN KENDALL'S OFFICE IN LONDON, HONEYCHURCH AND THE CHIEF INSPECTOR CAN ONLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE FAILURE OF THEIR INVESTIGATION.

I don't know how he did it, but that blasted Mortimer managed to slip between our fingers.

Two bullets through the heart. Regulation nine-millimetre. I've already given the order to have them sent to the lab for analysis.

ROWAN & SONS CALENDAR 1954 SATURDAY 19 JUNE

Could it be that Blake...? That's not like him...

Switching sides wasn't like him either. It's probably a false trail, but have all ports in the area placed under surveillance. It's possible Blake might attempt to reach the continent by boat.

There's something else, sirs...

A publican in York had a customer for lunch whose description matches that of Mortimer. The man asked him how to get to Seanberry.

Seanberry?

I know it. A pretty little village along the Swale, about thirty miles north of York.

Then take care of it personally, Kendall! And this time no pussyfooting! If it is Mortimer, arrest him and work on him until he spills the beans. I'm staying in London to coordinate the operations.

THE NEXT MORNING, THE WEATHER HAS TURNED FAIR AGAIN, AND VIRGINIA COMES BACK FROM A SHOPPING TRIP TO THE VILLAGE.

Good morning! Up already?

Hello, Virginia! You're even more of an early riser than I am, it seems.

That's from living in the country... Here, read this while I make breakfast. The news isn't very good, I'm afraid...

GOOD HEAVENS!!!

FRANCIS BLAKE TRAITOR AND MURDERER

From our correspondent

Maidstone, Saturday

The body of the spy Jennings who escaped from Scotland Yard on the 18th of June with the traitorous captain was found last night in an empty lot near Tonbridge. The man apparently

Sir Geoffrey Bannister seriously wounded in a car accident. The Home Secretary was admitted last night at Charing Cross Hospital, where he is still in a coma. The accident, cause as yet unknown, happened yesterday around 11pm while Sir Geoffrey was going home alone in his car. Notified immediately, Under-Secretary Harold Doyle-Smith was named acting Home Secretary by the Prime Minister until...

What do you think this means?

I don't know. But read the article at the bottom of the page...

It's unfortunate for poor Bannister, but I don't see...

Sir Geoffrey was the only one high up who knew the truth about Captain Blake's operation.

WHAT?!? You mean that neither the I.S. commander nor the Scotland Yard chief is in on this?

No. The captain distrusted everyone and everything and wanted to minimize the chance of a leak. This mission was top secret, and he set it up directly with the Home Secretary without involving his own superiors.

But... That means...

That if the minister was to die and things went sour for Captain Blake, there wouldn't be anyone left to prevent his conviction... or his execution by his own colleagues at the MI5!

So Sir Geoffrey's accident could be the result of a hostile action?

It's possible. Even likely. The real traitor has obviously figured out the captain's goal. And probably understood as well that the Home Secretary was his only cover.

Which proves that we are dealing with foes who will stop at nothing. And that the stakes of this game must be enormous.

Goodness, gracious! But what can we do?

Leave, for a start. I received my instructions last night: We leave Seanberry in half an hour.

To go where?

I'd rather not say. You never know what could happen during the trip.

TEN MINUTES LATER, A VERY TROUBLED MORTIMER IS ALMOST FINISHED PACKING WHEN THE SOUND OF A CAR STOPPING IN FRONT OF THE COTTAGE ATTRACTS HIS ATTENTION.

?

DAMN IT!! KENDALL!?

Mrs Campbell? Chief Inspector Kendall, Scotland Yard. I was told that you had a guest last night...

Er... Yes, indeed... But do come in, Chief Inspector.

A Mr Browning, I think. An eccentric who's cycling around Yorkshire. But he left over an hour ago.

Browning, you say... May I see the room where he stayed?

BUT WHEN SHE OPENS THE DOOR, SHE FINDS THE BEDROOM COMPLETELY EMPTY!

??

Well... I haven't cleaned up yet...

No matter.

AGAINST HER WILL, VIRGINIA LEADS THE CHIEF INSPECTOR UP THE STAIRS.

37

This Browning... Was he red-haired and bearded? Did he smoke a pipe?

That's... That's right. He must have been a doctor or something like that.

And he's gone, you say?

Yes. An hour ago. He said he was going to take the road to Hull.

DISAPPOINTED, KENDALL HEADS BACK DOWN THE STAIRS.

If he is cycling, we'll have no trouble catching him. And now I must apologise for having bothered you, Mrs Campbell.

Not at all, Chief Inspector.

So this Browning is a criminal?

Not precisely.

... AS HE SPOTS THE PIPE THAT MORTIMER HAS, UNFORTUNATELY, FORGOTTEN ON THE SITTING ROOM TABLE.

REALISING THAT HE HAS BEEN TRICKED, THE CHIEF INSPECTOR BOUNDS UP THE STAIRS...

... AND THROWS OPEN THE BEDROOM DOOR JUST AS MORTIMER CRAWLS OUT FROM HIS HIDING PLACE UNDER THE BED.

!?

He's wanted for...

BUT KENDALL STOPS SUDDENLY...

Oh dear, Professor... Thinking of a career as a farce character, are we?

Don't push it, Kendall. I feel ridiculous enough as it is.

You made a mistake leaving London, Mortimer. We did warn you.

You're wasting your time, Kendall. I have no idea where Blake is.

We'll see about that. Where's the woman?

She went out, sir. I had no orders to...

Never mind. We'll take care of her later. Our quarry first.

BUT AS THE POLICEMEN ARE ABOUT TO USHER MORTIMER INTO THEIR CAR...

PROFESSOR! THIS WAY!

POLICE

AXS 937

IT'S VIRGINIA, AT THE WHEEL OF HER LITTLE TRIUMPH CONVERTIBLE; ENGINE ROARING, SHE DRIVES UP TO THE GROUP. WHILE THE POLICEMEN STAND DUMBFOUNDED, MORTIMER REACTS IMMEDIATELY: HE ELBOWS KENDALL ASIDE...

OOOMPH!

OHP 242

... THROWS HIS SUITCASE AT THE CONSTABLE...

OW!

... BLINDS THE DRIVER WITH HIS TRENCH COAT...

??

... AND JUMPS INTO THE SPORTS CAR AS IT ROARS AWAY AT TOP SPEED.

VRROOOO

OHP 242

ONE OF THE OFFICERS DRAWS HIS WEAPON. BUT KENDALL IMMEDIATELY STOPS HIM.

NO, HOLD YOUR FIRE!

Get in the car, quick! Let's try to catch them!

DRIVING OVER THE SIDEWALK, THE POLICE CAR TURNS AROUND AND DASHES AFTER THE FUGITIVES.

POLICE
AXS 933

THE TWO VEHICLES THUNDER THROUGH THE PEACEFUL VILLAGE...

THE WHITE HART

OHP 242

POLICE

... BUT JUST AFTER LEAVING IT, THE TRIUMPH SUDDENLY TAKES A SHARP TURN ONTO A SMALL FOREST ROAD.

?

39

THIRTY SECONDS LATER, THE POLICE CAR FLIES PAST WITHOUT STOPPING.

BUT KENDALL QUICKLY GATHERS THAT HE'S BEEN HAD ONCE AGAIN.

No point in going on—they must have taken a side road. Why on earth don't you have a radio in this car?

Er... Sorry, sir.

We lack proper funding; you know how it is.

Never mind! Let's go back to Seanberry. From there I'll be able to contact the central station in York and have roadblocks set up. With such a conspicuous car, they won't escape us for long.

MEANWHILE, BY FOREST ROADS, THE TRIUMPH HAS ARRIVED IN OPEN COUNTRY.

A classic manoeuvre, my dear, and perfectly executed. Where did you learn to drive like that?

At the wheel of an ambulance during the war. I must confess it gave me the bad habit of not worrying too much about traffic regulations.

I won't be the one to call you out on it. But, speaking of traffic, it's obvious that Kendall is going to set up roadblocks throughout this entire area.

I would think so. But don't worry. I have a little diversion planned.

I'm impressed, Virginia. Did Francis teach you how to handle all this so well?

Captain Blake taught me everything a good agent must know, Professor. The life of a country widow isn't always very exciting.

By giving me a chance to help him and to serve my country, he gave new meaning to my existence.

That was a proclamation of faith if ever I heard one... I therefore place myself completely in your hands. And since, thank God, I have lost my luggage but recovered my pipe, everything is perfectly fine.

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, THE TRIUMPH COMES INTO VIEW OF A LARGE FARM...

40

... IN THE COURTYARD OF WHICH, TWO DOUR-LOOKING FARMERS APPEAR TO BE WAITING FOR THEM.

Don't worry— they're friends.

And now, Professor, take off your clothes.

!?

You're going to switch clothes with Douglas here. You must be about the same size. You'll give him your papers as well.

I... I beg your pardon?

UNDERSTANDING VIRGINIA'S PLAN, MORTIMER OBEYS. A FEW MINUTES LATER, HE HAS TURNED INTO A FARMER.

What do you think, then?

It should work. That is, if no one notices your Oxford scholar accent if they ask you a question.

This is where we part company, Professor. Taylor, Douglas' uncle, will take you wherever you need to go.

What about you?

Don't worry about me. Professor, I... I very much admire Captain Blake. I hope you can help him reach the target he's after.

I promise I'll do everything I can, Virginia. Thank you, and... farewell!

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, MORTIMER AND TAYLOR ALSO LEAVE THE FARM IN AN OLD TRUCK.

Sit your behind nice and cosy, me lad. We're in for a long ride...

Where are we going?

To the Scottish border, for a start.

?

A FEW HOURS LATER, IN YORK'S CENTRAL POLICE STATION, WHERE KENDALL IS COORDINATING OPERATIONS...

Chief Inspector, we caught them! In Hull, where they were naively trying to board a ferry to the continent.

Are you certain it's them?

The car and descriptions are right. And the bearded man's papers say Philip Mortimer...

About time! Right, I'm going right away! I want to interrogate them myself!

AN HOUR LATER, THE SCOTLAND YARD OFFICER ENTERS THE OFFICES OF HULL'S MARITIME POLICE.

I'm Chief Inspector Kendall. Where are they?

In the interrogation room. They've been given some food.

BUT AS KENDALL ENTERS THE ROOM TO WHICH HE WAS DIRECTED...

Well, what a surprise! Hello, Chief Inspector!

But... Who is this man?!?

I asked you a question, Mrs Campbell: WHO is this person!?

A hitchhiker I was kind enough to take onboard my car and who is wondering, as I am, what he's doing here. But what's going on, Chief Inspector? You're all red...

Have it your way, Mrs Campbell. You'll learn the cost of obstructing British justice!

BUT THE UNFORTUNATE POLICEMAN, SEETHING, STILL HAS TO GIVE HIS SUPERIOR A REPORT...

... WHICH IS IMMEDIATELY RELAYED TO THE MAN'S COLLEAGUES AT THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE.

It seems poor Kendall's been had yet again. This Mortimer is really quite good; we underestimated him.

He had help, obviously.

Which proves he really is Blake's accomplice. This Mrs Campbell must be part of the network.

I gave orders to have her brought back to London along with the man she was with. But I doubt we'll get much out of her.

In short, you're stuck...

Blake can't be found, Mortimer has disappeared, and you, you still don't have the shadow of the beginning of a trail. And, as I'm sure you know, with Sir Geoffrey's accident, it is I who will have to face the next Parliamentary meeting on the Blake Affair.

So, let's be clear, gentlemen... Unfortunately, I must leave for three days. If, when I get back, you do not have any tangible results to offer, I want your letters of resignation on my desk instead. Good evening, gentlemen!

42

AFTER THE UNDER-SECRETARY HAS LEFT, HONEYCHURCH AND COLONEL CARTWRIGHT EXCHANGE WORRIED LOOKS.

Hell! Our acting minister doesn't seem pleased!

I can understand why... If Parliament brings the government down over this business, he'll get the blame for it, and his political career will be in serious jeopardy.

Which leaves us three days to solve this problem. You should go home and get some rest, Honeychurch. You haven't slept in over 48 hours.

Thanks, Colonel. But I'll have trouble sleeping until we get our hands on Blake... one way or another.

TWO HOURS LATER, HONEYCHURCH LEAVES THE I.S. OFFICES WITH A SALUTE FROM THE SENTRY...

IN OUT

THOROUGHFARE

... AND WALKS BACK TO HIS SMALL BACHELOR PAD IN SOUTH AUDLEY STREET.

ONCE HOME, HE OPENS A SECRET COMPARTMENT IN HIS BOOKCASE...

... REVEALING AN ADVANCED SHORT-WAVE EMITTER.

WITHOUT WASTING ANY TIME, THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF MI5 DONS THE HEADPHONES AND BEGINS SENDING A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

Blue Parrot to Black Horse... Blue Parrot to Black Horse... Come in, Black Horse...

Red Buffalo is en route to the rendezvous point... I repeat: Red Buffalo is en route to the rendezvous point...

BUT, AS HONEYCHURCH, HIS MESSAGE SENT, IS ABOUT TO PUT HIS EQUIPMENT AWAY...

... THE SOUND OF A DOOR OPENING MAKES HIM JUMP SUDDENLY.

?

?!?

I'm happy to see that we both enjoy working overtime... Drop those headphones, Mr Honeychurch: You are under arrest!

43

AT THAT INSTANT, HAVING CROSSED SEVERAL POLICE CHECKPOINTS WITHOUT PROBLEMS, TAYLOR AND MORTIMER REACH THE FAMOUS HADRIAN'S WALL, WHICH MARKS THE BORDER OF SCOTLAND.

This is where England ends, me lad. And this is where you change guides.

?

AFTER STOPPING HIS TRUCK AND ASKING HIS PASSENGER TO GET OFF, TAYLOR LETS OUT A STRANGELY MODULATED WHISTLE.

?

AT THIS SIGNAL, A BLOND GIANT OF A MAN COMES OUT OF A SMALL, DERELICT SHEEP-HOUSE AND CALMLY WALKS UP TO THE TWO MEN.

Sergeant Ian Cameron, retired, at your service, Professor! And welcome home! I was told you're Scottish too?

Only half. My mother was related to the Mac Quarrie clan.

Then you got your better half from her. Come, Professor, we have no time to waste.

AFTER TAKING LEAVE OF THE FARMER, MORTIMER FOLLOWS HIS NEW GUIDE ALONG A TRAIL...

... UNTIL THEY REACH A CROSSROADS WHERE A SMALL GROUP OF MEN APPEARS TO BE WAITING FOR THEM WITH TWO TRUCKS.

We came to sell our sheep at the Carlisle market, and now we're going home.

Fàilte!*

Fàilte!*

Are these "friends", too?

Not in the way you mean, Professor. But they're all veterans of the 3rd Scottish Rifles. They'll ask no questions.

Try to get some sleep during the trip. We have over 400 miles to go and we'll drive all night.

?

*"Welcome" in Gaelic

TWELVE HOURS LATER, AND LONG AFTER THE SUN HAS RISEN, THE TWO TRUCKS HAVE REACHED THE DESOLATE MOORS OF THE UPPER HIGHLANDS.

Gorgeous, isn't it?

Indeed.

Well, you'll have plenty of opportunity to enjoy the scenery from up close, Professor. This is where you get off.

Here!?

Walk due north for about 2 miles until you reach a "cromlech." Then you wait.

Wait for what? Or whom?

I don't know — my work ends here. Here, take this "cromach." And my compliments to Captain Blake when you see him.

AND WHILE THE TRUCKS DRIVE OFF IN A CLOUD OF DUST, MORTIMER, SOMEWHAT CONFUSED, FINDS HIMSELF ALONE ON THE DESERTED MOOR.

Well, if I must walk, then let's walk!

And there is the "cromlech," as promised...

BUT THE SANCTUARY IS DESERTED.

No one's here! Who on earth am I supposed to wait for here? A new guide, most likely... But to take me where, in the end?

THE ONLY SIGNS OF HUMAN PRESENCE IN THIS DESOLATE PLACE ARE A SMALL PLANE CIRCLING IN THE CLOUDLESS SKY...

... AND IN THE DISTANCE, A SHEPHERD TENDING HIS FLOCK.

Very well, let's wait. I hardly have a choice, anyway...

THE MINUTES PASS BY, AGONISINGLY SLOW. THE PLANE IS GONE, AND THE SURPRISING SILENCE OF THE MOOR IS BROKEN ONLY BY THE OCCASIONAL BLEATING OF THE SHEEP AS THEY GET NEARER TO THE "CROMLECH."

Darn! My watch stopped. I forgot to rewind it last night.

Excuse me, my good man. you wouldn't have the time, by any chance?

It is precisely 10:30, Professor Mortimer.

?!?

Francis?!? Is that really you?!?

Hello, Philip! Glad to see you made it all right, old boy!

Good old Francis! You still practice the art of disguise, I see.

You're not too bad yourself, old chap. If the members of the Centaur Club could see us now, I rather think they'd choke on their port...

I'm damn glad to find you in one piece. Your "cousin" explained what you're trying to do. This is madness, Francis! Your colleagues at the I.S. want your head at all costs. And now that Bannister isn't there to cover for you any more...

Occupational hazards. But wait: You haven't heard everything yet...

IN A FEW WORDS, THE TWO FRIENDS TELL EACH OTHER OF THEIR RESPECTIVE ADVENTURES.

So I've failed in my attempt to infiltrate the enemy spy network and identify the traitor in the I.S. But I still have the opportunity to thwart their plans.

What do you mean?

Olrik! Him again! Apparently, we're doomed to find him always in our path, that damned colonel!

I must confess I didn't expect it. He put my back to the wall by trying to force me to execute poor Fielding.

Come with me; I'll show you. Do you remember that I told you about my feeling that the enemy was preparing a large-scale operation...?

Indeed. But what is it?

HAVING LED MORTIMER TO THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF, BLAKE GIVES HIM A PAIR OF BINOCULARS FROM HIS BAG.

Look over there, behind that fold of the cliff...

??

But that's Ardmuir Castle! That's where I was invited to attend a physics seminar.

A seminar that begins today, if memory serves...

With everything that happened, I'd totally forgotten.

I found one of those publications on Ardmuir Castle in Olrik's pocket. And that's how I finally understood what kind of "move" our enemies were preparing: the kidnapping by a foreign power of the best physicists in the Kingdom!

?

Good heavens!! That... That would be appalling!

Indeed. This would represent a technological step backward of almost ten years for Great Britain and her allies. And, an equivalent gain for the country that would thus obtain the forced collaboration of the unfortunate scientists.

Olrik and his "employers" heard about this seminar organised by philanthropist Adrian Deloraine. Nothing would be easier for a small, determined group...

... than to secure this isolated castle, grab the guests and escape by sea with their prisoners. This Highlands coast is difficult to patrol.

By the Devil! But... What if you're wrong, Francis? After all, it's only an intuition you have.

It's possible, but I doubt it. What do the words "grianstad sa samhradh" mean, Philip?

Damnation! In that case, there's no time to waste! But what can you do, Francis? Officially, you're a traitor and a murderer, a fugitive. The only one who can attest to your innocence, Sir Geoffrey, is still in a coma in a hospital bed.

I have two other aces up my sleeve, my dear chap...

The first is my deputy, David Honeychurch...

Honeychurch!? But, from what I could see, he's the most determined to get his hands on you!

He is, above all, an excellent actor. And a loyal lad who has my absolute trust.

It's Gaelic. It means "summer solstice."

That's today, the 21st of June. Those words were written on the back of the leaflet I found in Olrik's pocket. From that, I gather that the operation will take place today, tonight at the latest.

He's known everything from the start. I was "burned" with his help, and I kept in touch with him whenever I could. Among other things, he's the one who had poor Fielding picked up and who arranged for his treatment at a private clinic. And it's also he who was my link to all the different "cousins" I might need.

Honeychurch is still in London and only needs my signal to launch an airborne intervention on Ardmuir Castle. An SAS* unit was placed on alert less than a hundred miles from here.

I see. And your second ace?

What a question... But that's you, of course!

ME!?

48

* Special Air Service

But how?

You will go to Ardmuir Castle and convince Deloraine and his guests to leave the castle immediately. You're a respected scientist, and your colleagues will listen to you.

And if we stumble upon Olrik and his gang?

I'll contact Honeychurch right away. The SAS will be at Ardmuir Castle in less than two hours, and then Olrik won't be able to try anything.

All right. But how are you going to contact your deputy? I haven't seen many phone boxes in the area.

With this. Honeychurch sent it to me through one of my "cousins."

Blimey! You really have the very best in the I.S.!

The latest in short-wave transmitter-receivers, miniaturised thanks to these recently discovered semiconductors they call transistors. Minimal encumbrance and unlimited range. A real gem!

HAVING PUT THE EARPHONES ON, BLAKE STARTS TRANSMITTING ON THE AGREED-UPON WAVELENGTH.

Black Horse to Blue Parrot... Black Horse to Blue Parrot...

BUT THE ONLY ANSWER IS A MOCKING VOICE SNIGGERING AT HIM.

Terribly sorry, Captain Blake, but there's no one left at the number you're calling! HA! HA! HA!

The devil!

That was Olrik's voice!

Look over there—that plane is coming back! I'll bet you that's him!

IT IS INDEED OLRIK, WHO, AT THE SMALL PLANE'S CONTROLS, GIVES OUR TWO FRIENDS AN IRONIC SALUTE.

That was some runaround you put me through, my dear Blake. Very well. Now let's see how well you and the professor run, ha! Ha!

AT THAT MOMENT, A DOZEN THREATENING SILHOUETTES APPEAR OVER THE TOP OF THE NEXT HILL.

Sorry I dragged you into this mess, old chap. But I'll bet they have orders to take us alive, and that gives us a chance. We'll split up, and you'll try to reach the castle. As for me, I'll try to contact the SAS directly.

All right! Good luck, Francis!

PUTTING BLAKE'S PLAN INTO ACTION, OUR TWO FRIENDS RUN OFF IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. SPLITTING INTO TWO GROUPS, THE BLACK-CLAD MEN CHASE AFTER THEM.

MORTIMER IS RUNNING AS HARD AS HE CAN ALONG THE CLIFF'S EDGE TOWARDS ARDMUIR CASTLE, WHOSE STILL-DISTANT SILHOUETTE LOOMS ON THE HORIZON.

BUT, SUDDENLY, HE IS STOPPED COLD IN HIS RACE BY A DEEP CHASM THAT OPENS IN HIS PATH.

?!?

SEEING HIM CORNERED, HIS PURSUERS FAN OUT TO CUT OFF HIS RETREAT...

... WHILE ONE OF THEM CALLS OUT TO HIM WITH A STRONG FOREIGN ACCENT.

Give it up, Professor. You're out of luck. Give yourself up peacefully and you won't be harmed.

Surrender? Me!? You really don't know me, friend!

AND, TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE MEN IN BLACK, MORTIMER JUMPS OFF THE EDGE.

!?!

? ?

??

?

PLOOSH

He fell over 60 yards!... There isn't a chance in the world he could have made it.

Dunno... I heard that this Mortimer was a tough customer.

You stay here just in case... You never know. I'll go tell the boss what happened.

OK.

MEANWHILE, BLAKE, WHO KNOWS NOTHING OF THE TRAGIC EVENT THAT HAS JUST TRANSPIRED, AND CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY THE PACK HUNTING HIM...

... REACHES A SMALL DIRT ROAD, BREATHLESS.

Good heavens, I'm exhausted... If only some car would drive by...

Hurrah! There's one coming! I hope it'll agree to stop!...

OBEYING BLAKE'S INJUNCTION, THE CAR, A LUXURY SALOON WITH CHAUFFEUR, STOPS NEAR THE CAPTAIN.

BLAKE IMMEDIATELY RUSHES TO THE REAR DOOR AND OPENS IT.

Quickly, help me, I'm being chased by...?!?

Well, well, what a pleasant surprise!... That dear Captain Blake! But do get in, please!

AND WHILE THE CAR DRIVES OFF WITH BLAKE, TO THE GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT OF HIS PURSUERS...

... THE CAPTAIN STILL HASN'T RECOVERED FROM THE SURPRISE OF FINDING HIMSELF WITH THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE HOME OFFICE.

Fate sometimes plays strange tricks, don't you think? Every policeman in the Kingdom is after you, and it is I, your commanding minister, who gets his hands on you.

And a good thing, too, that I always keep a gun in my car... But why on earth did you come to this backwater, Captain? And wearing these clothes, too. And who are these people who seemed so poorly inclined towards you?

Allow me to return the question first, sir. How did you come to be here?

But... I'm going home, my dear fellow. Ardmuir Castle belongs to me, inherited from my uncle Lord Tavistock, third Earl of Blairgowrie, who died childless two years ago. I lent it for a few days to Adrian Deloraine, who had the courtesy to invite me to his physics seminar. High-level sciences were always a passion of mine.

Of course, as soon as we arrive, I'll call the police to have you arrested. This will look very good in the papers: "The Under-Secretary of State of the Home Office personally captures the elusive Captain Blake."

I think I ought to tell you the whole story, sir.

AND WHILE THE BENTLEY DRIVES ON TO THE CASTLE, BLAKE RECOUNTS HIS ADVENTURES TO THE HONOURABLE HAROLD DOYLE-SMITH.

BUT THE LATTER REMAINS SCEPTICAL.

So you claim that your "betrayal" was a sting planned with the agreement of Sir Geoffrey, whom we unfortunately cannot question, and with the help of your deputy, who could just as well simply be your accomplice. It's hard to swallow, dear boy.

GW 794

Let me call Honeychurch, sir! By coming here, you find yourself in as much danger as our physicists. Olrik and his men, a sample of whom you've seen, already have the castle surrounded.

Fine. But I trust you won't mind if, until I get proof of your good faith, I keep my gun on you. You can get out, Captain: We're here.

THE BENTLEY HAS INDEED STOPPED IN THE SUPERB HONOUR COURTYARD OF THE CASTLE, WHERE THE CARS THAT BROUGHT THE SEMINAR'S ATTENDEES ARE ALREADY PARKED. A MAN OF IMPOSING STATURE CORDIALLY GREETS THE NEWLY ARRIVED.

Hello, Doyle-Smith! Glad you could make it, old fellow!

Hello, Deloraine!

But who is that gibbet bait you're bringing us, my dear friend? Some highwayman who tried to rob you, ha, ha?

May I introduce the infamous Captain Blake, whose exploits you have assuredly read about in the papers. He's come to warn us that evil spies planned to kidnap you and your guests.

Kidnap us!?... Here!?... You must tell me that story, Captain! I simply love crime stories. But let's go to the library, where we'll be more at ease. Our physicists are having lunch in the great hall.

Just a word to my chauffeur, if you don't mind...

Take care of the package in the boot, Larkin. You know what to do with it...

Certainly, sir.

AS HE WALKS DOWN THE CORRIDOR LEADING TO THE LIBRARY, BLAKE IS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH A HAZY SENSE OF UNEASE, AS IF THE VERY WALLS OF THE CASTLE WERE OOZING AN UNEXPLAINABLE HOSTILITY.

There's the telephone, Captain. Do call your deputy.

In the meantime, I'll pour us some drinks. Whisky, port or sherry, Captain?

Sherry, with pleasure.

BUT AS HE IS ABOUT TO DIAL THE NUMBER, BLAKE FREEZES IN MID-GESTURE...

... SUDDENLY FASCINATED BY DELORAINE'S LEFT HAND...

A SIX-FINGERED HAND!!!

What's the matter, Captain? Don't you want to call, anymore?

I...

HELL!!

WITH ONE MIGHTY LEAP, PUSHING DELORAINE ASIDE, BLAKE REACHES DOYLE-SMITH AND SNATCHES THE GUN FROM HIM.

!?

Drop the masks and raise your hands, gentlemen. It took me a while, but I finally understand who you really are...

You, Deloraine, the true leader of the spy ring that you set up in Great Britain under the cover of your activities as an industrial philanthropist and patron of the sciences...

That's easy to figure out. I made the mistake of trying to question your agent Fielding myself, and he told you about my hand, didn't he? A very rare anomaly called polydactylia, of which an ancient Eastern tradition says that those afflicted by it are blessed by the gods.

The gods won't help you anymore, Deloraine...

And you, Doyle-Smith, the traitor who kept Deloraine informed of everything that was said at the I.S. meetings you attended.

What can I say, dear fellow... A castle's upkeep is horribly expensive, and the salary of an Under-Secretary isn't precisely royal. But how did you guess?

In less than two hours, an SAS unit will have invaded Ardmuir Castle, and you will have lost the game, gentlemen!

I'm afraid you're bluffing, Captain. Those SAS were supposed to have been alerted by your deputy, weren't they? In which case, I have bad news for you...

Dear Honeychurch came all the way from London in the boot of my car and is currently inside a solid cell below our feet. Like all Scottish castles, Ardmuir has some extremely quaint dungeons.

Dungeons that you will soon visit yourself, my dear Blake. Do drop this gun; you won't need it anymore!

Olrik!!

It is you who have lost the game, Captain. At this very moment, my guests are sleeping like innocent babies, knocked out by the drugged drinks that were served with their lunch. By the time they wake up, they'll be in their new homeland. And you will come along on this trip... The head of the MI5 and his deputy: What a godsend for my department!

Maybe... But you and Doyle-Smith will be "burned" throughout the entire Western world.

And who would "burn" us, dear fellow? With you and Honeychurch gone, the only one who still could would be your Fielding, whom Doyle-Smith will take care of as soon as he gets back to London. As for me, I will personally alert the police after escaping from the room in which Olrik's men supposedly had me locked.

In everybody's eyes, you are the traitor, Captain. A betrayal that will be sufficiently confirmed by your switching to the other side.

One last detail, Blake... If you're counting on your friend Mortimer to come to the rescue, I have the sad duty to inform you that he fell off a cliff and that his corpse is currently floating towards the Shetlands. There's a conclusion that finally repays me for all the trouble you've caused me all these years.

You fiend!

CRUSHED BY THIS LAST PIECE OF NEWS, BLAKE ALLOWS HIMSELF TO BE LED INTO THE CASTLE'S DUNGEONS WITHOUT RESISTANCE...

... AND IS ROUGHLY SHOVED INTO A SINISTER CELL BY JACK.

Captain?!... They got you, too?!

Hello, David! I'm afraid so, my boy.

I fear all is lost. Mortimer is dead because of me, and I really don't see who could save us now.

AT THAT MOMENT, ON THE CLIFF...

Hey, get over here! The boss needs us!

OK, I'm coming!

AS OLRIK'S MEN WALK AWAY, A FAMILIAR FACE EMERGES FROM ITS HIDING PLACE.

Phew! It's about time! I was starting to get bored here.

55

Jumping on this ledge and throwing a rock into the sea to make them think I fell was a good idea. The problem now is that I'm stuck.

Climbing this overhang without equipment seems impossible...

And, as for going down, let's forget it.

Dammit Yet, I have to find a way to get out of here!

What can there be behind these rocks? Maybe the entrance to a cave...

HAVING CLEARED THE ROCKS BLOCKING ITS ENTRANCE, MORTIMER DOES INDEED DISCOVER A CRACK THAT DESCENDS UNDER THE CLIFF.

Well, that won't take me very far... Unless this passage there... After all, I don't have much to lose by trying.

AND WITHOUT HESITATION, HE CRAWLS INTO THE NARROW TUNNEL THAT BEGINS AT THE BACK OF THE CAVE.

Mortimer, my friend, I hope you're not being a fool! If I get stuck, I'll have a pretty hard time going backwards.

CAREFULLY STEPPING OUT OF THE TUNNEL, THE PROFESSOR FEELS SOLID GROUND UNDER HIS FOOT.

HE LIGHTS A MATCH AND...

!?

SUDDENLY, HIS HAND FINDS EMPTY SPACE.

This cave... It looks like it's been worked on... You can clearly see the marks of the bevel in the rock. Very old marks... And there, it looks like...

These glyphs... They look like Pict symbols... Those mysterious people who lived in Northern Scotland even before the Scots and the Gaels, and of whom we know almost nothing... This would be quite extraordinary!

Rats! Only a dozen matches left... I really can't dilly-dally! Besides, this isn't the time for archaeology.

Could this be a passage? It looks like it, yes... I can only hope it'll lead me out of here.

I really must come back here once this whole thing is over. I'm sure there are plenty of discoveries to be made here.

RESOLUTE, MORTIMER STARTS DOWN THE DARK PASSAGE-WAY.

There's no doubt this passage was carved by man, probably over two thousand years ago... This is amazing!

The part that worries me, though, is that it's heading down...

AND FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER...

It's still heading down... If this keeps on, I'm going to find myself below sea level.

?!?

A DEAD END!! I'm trapped! And that was my last match!...

BUT IN THE DARKNESS, MORTIMER NOTICES A RAY OF LIGHT COMING THROUGH A NARROW SLIT IN THE TUNNEL WALL.

?

AS HE LEANS FORWARD TO LOOK THROUGH THE OPE-NING, HE LETS OUT A MUFFLED CRY OF AMAZEMENT.

GOOD HEAVENS!!

57

A SECRET SUBMARINE BASE!!!

And over there... That villain Olrik directing operations!

My goodness! These men being carried into the submarine... Paxton!...

And Mc Gillivray!... These are my physicist colleagues!

Good Lord! So Blake was right! And it looks like these rascals could leave any moment. Did Francis manage to call the SAS? I hope so... In the meantime, I have to do something! But what, in Heaven's name!? What!?

The first thing to do is get out of here. This wall seems sufficiently thin and crumbly for me to widen the hole without making too much noise. Besides, these gentlemen are far too busy to pay any attention to me.

INDEED, A FEW MINUTES LATER THE PROFESSOR HAS MANAGED TO MAKE A LARGE ENOUGH OPENING TO WRIGGLE OUT OF THE PASSAGE.

SNEAKING ALONG THE ROCKY WALLS, HE MANAGES TO REACH SOME STAIRS WITHOUT BEING SEEN AND CAREFULLY STARTS CLIMBING.

58

SUDDENLY, THE SOUND OF VOICES DRIFTS DOWN FROM ABOVE...

Do you think everything will go well?

?

Oh, stop worrying, Harold. As soon as Blake and Honeychurch are onboard the submarine, we'll wall off the access to these stairs and no one will even suspect they were there.

Well I'll be...! Adrian Deloraine! We must be under Ardmuir Castle. And he's in league with that bandit Olrik! Now I understand everything!

They spoke of getting Francis and his deputy onboard, which must mean that they're being kept prisoner somewhere in the castle. If only I could set them free...

STILL HEADING UP, MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF IN A NARROW BUT WELL-LIT VAULTED CORRIDOR.

This must be the castle's cellars... Now's the time to be extra careful.

HE FREEZES AS, AROUND A CORNER, HE CATCHES SIGHT OF AN ARMED GUARD WHO'S SITTING ON A CHAIR AND READING A MAGAZINE.

Pssssssst...

?

Revlon's new

INTRIGUED BUT NOT ALARMED, THE MAN STANDS UP AND APPROACHES...

... ONLY TO BE GREETED BY A POWERFUL HOOK TO THE CHIN.

OW!!

Down for the count. I'll bet Francis must be behind one of the doors these keys will open for me.

AND A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

Hello, gentlemen! What would you say to a full release, no parole?

Philip!!... Thank God you're alive!

WHILE REMOVING THEIR BONDS, MORTIMER HAS TOLD THE TWO I.S. MEN WHAT HE HAS JUST LEARNED.

Damn! This leaves us with little time! But all is not lost: Here's what we're going to do...

59

BLAKE HASTILY EXPLAINS HIS PLAN.

David, you're going to put on our jailor's clothes and try to leave the castle unnoticed. Two or three miles from here, you'll find a "cromlech" near the cliff's edge. That's where I hid my transmitter — with it, you can call the SAS to the rescue.

What about you in the meantime?

We'll try to stop these rascals from leaving until the assault troops arrive. Go, old chap! And good luck!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, AFTER HAVING LOCKED THE GUARD INSIDE THE CELL AND PUTTING ON HIS OUTFIT, HONEYCHURCH CAREFULLY LEAVES THE CELLARS.

May God grant him success! In theory, there shouldn't be many left up there.

I wouldn't be opposed to a little Godly help coming our way either. How do you intend to proceed, Francis?

Do you hear those engine noises? There must be a generator somewhere close by. The castle's normal power grid would be insufficient to provide for these cellars and the base you told me about.

You were right—there it is! You're thinking about crippling it, aren't you?

Yes, for a start. After that we'll have to improvise.

USING HIS WEAPON'S BARREL, MORTIMER EASILY BREAKS THE WIRE MESH GATE'S SAFETY LOCK.

Blimey! This won't be easy!

Luck is on our side, Philip... Take a look!

Dynamite sticks, Bickford safety fuses, a detonator... Good grief! There's enough here to blow up the whole cliff!

That won't be necessary...

WITH A FEW PRECISE MOVEMENTS, BLAKE ATTACHES TWO DYNAMITE STICKS TO THE OUTPUT TERMINAL OF THE GENERATOR.

This should do. I used a short fuse, just enough time to get to a safe distance.

ONCE THE FUSE IS LIT, OUR TWO FRIENDS HURRIEDLY RETREAT, CARRYING THE CRATE OF EXPLOSIVES.

AND ONE MINUTE LATER THE DYNAMITE EXPLODES...

BOOOM

... INSTANTLY PLUNGING THE WHOLE SUBBASEMENT INTO DARKNESS.

?!?

What's happening? I thought I heard a muffled explosion.

It was probably the generator overheating... I'm sending someone right away.

You two go to the generator and see what happened. Jack, take two men and go get Blake and his deputy! We can't stay here forever.

All right!

Captain, assemble your crew and prepare to get underway. We have to be outside of British territorial waters in less than two hours.

Aye aye, Colonel!

MEANWHILE, UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE MANAGED TO REACH THE SPOT WHERE THE PROFESSOR'S TUNNEL ENDED, WITHOUT BEING SEEN.

What are you doing? You're not thinking about blowing up the submarine, are you?

Rest easy, old chap...

I'm just taking enough to put the screw and rudder out of commission. That way, the sub will be immobilized without putting our scientists inside in any danger.

This is madness, Francis! You'll never make it!

I have to try! It's the only way to prevent them from leaving before the reinforcements arrive. Synchronize your watch, Philip! In fifteen minutes exactly, whether you've seen me get back or not, push the detonator. Understood?

Understood. Be careful, I beg of you.

THE NEXT MOMENT, MORTIMER WATCHES WITH A HEAVY HEART AS BLAKE CREEPS BETWEEN THE ROCKS, UNWINDING BEHIND HIM THE BICKFORD FUSE CONNECTED TO THE DETONATOR...

... WHILE OLRIK IS GETTING SOME BAD NEWS.

The generator was sabotaged, sir! It's beyond repair!

And the dynamite has disappeared!

Hell and damnation! Who could have?...

Boss! Blake and Honeychurch got away!

By the devil! So it was them who played that trick on us!

Get back upstairs and close all the exits — search every corner of the castle, the cellars and the cave! I want to find Blake, dead or alive!

61

WHILE OLRIK'S MEN ARE BUSY LOOKING FOR HIM...

... BLAKE MANAGES TO SLIP UNSEEN INTO THE WATER OF THE NATURAL COVE.

THANKS TO THE DAYLIGHT COMING FROM OUTSIDE, THE WATER IS SUFFICIENTLY CLEAR TO ALLOW HIM TO ORIENTATE HIMSELF AND MAKE FOR HIS OBJECTIVE.

Never mind Blake, Colonel! Our mission is accomplished. You can leave right away.

Every extra hour spent here is only increasing the risks.

A few more minutes won't make a difference, gentlemen...

This is personal. Captain Blake and I have some old scores to settle.

... FORCED SEVERAL TIMES TO SURFACE TO BREATHE, BLAKE STRUGGLES TO ATTACH THE DYNAMITE TO THE TRANSMISSION SHAFT OF THE SUBMARINE'S PROPELLER...

... WHILE MORTIMER, HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS, WORRIES HIMSELF SICK AND CHECKS THE ILLUMINATED FACE OF HIS WATCH INCESSANTLY.

Anything?

Nothing, Colonel! We can't find them!

Hey!?... What is this!?

The fifteen minutes are up, and still no sign of Blake! Good God, what am I supposed to do!?... Well, I'll just have to obey him: I'm pushing the plunger!

Take your hands off that detonator, Professor! Or, regrettably, I'll be forced to blow your head off!

?!?

62

I hoped I was well rid of you, but it looks like pipe-smoking bearded men just won't die... I suppose your friend Blake is on the other side of this wire?

Don't expect me to tell you, my dear Olrik.

No matter! Come, Professor, we're going on a cruise... I'm certain the skills of the Swordfish inventor will be greatly appreciated by the government I'm working for.

BUT, QUICK AS LIGHTNING, MORTIMER SWEEPS ASIDE OLRIK'S PISTOL WITH HIS ARM...

Sorry, "Colonel"...

... AND WHIRLS AROUND TO GIVE THE RENEGADE HIS BEST RIGHT HOOK.

... I've always loathed package tours!

GAINING THE ADVANTAGE, OLRIK PUTS BOTH HIS HANDS AROUND MORTIMER'S NECK AND SQUEEZES...

... UNTIL, WITH A DESPERATE BURST OF ENERGY, THE PROFESSOR PROPELS HIS FOE OVER WITH BOTH FEET...

... AND INTO A ROCK. KNOCKED OUT, OLRIK'S FULL WEIGHT FALLS ON THE DETONATOR.

BOOOM

?

?

?!?

?

??

63

What is this!? What happened!? Where's Olrik?

I don't know...

Over there... look!

Get him!

It's Blake!

!

BUT AS THE MEN IN BLACK ARE GETTING READY TO GRAB BLAKE, A BURST OF GUNFIRE FORCES THEM BACK.

RAT TAT TAT TAT TAT

Wizzzz

Hello, Francis! This way, quick!

Glad to see you again in one piece! Here, take this, courtesy of our friend Olrik. I guess we'll just have to give them what for until the cavalry arrives.

If it comes... With only one pistol and a submachine-gun, we're not going to last very long!

AS IF TO CONFIRM THE CAPTAIN'S STATEMENT, A HAIL OF BULLETS STRIKES THE BOULDER BEHIND WHICH OUR TWO FRIENDS ARE SHELTERING...

Wizzzz RAT TAT TAT Wizzzz TAT BANG BANG

... PROMPTING AN IMMEDIATE ANSWER FROM THEM.

RAT TAT TAT TAT TAT BANG BANG

MEANWHILE, OLRIK, HAVING REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS, RETURNS TO HIS ACCOMPLICES.

What's going on?

Blake managed to blow up the submarine's propeller and rudder!

TAT TAT RAT

We could use the dynamite as grenades...

Too dangerous. The ceiling could crack and collapse, burying us all.

64

Can it be repaired, Captain?

Not with the means at our disposal here. I'm afraid we're stuck here, Colonel.

We have one chance left: Let's get away with the cars parked in the courtyard!

Then let's move in for the kill! Give me that, you... I want to deliver the killing blow myself.

Run if you wish, gentlemen. As for me, I will not leave until I collect the heads of those damned Blake and Mortimer! What's the situation, Jack?

They have us pinned, but they'll soon be out of ammo.

LEAVING OLRIK TO HIS THIRST FOR VENGEANCE, DELORAINE, DOYLE-SMITH AND SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE SUBMARINE CREW HURRIEDLY HEAD UP TO THE CASTLE...

... WHERE A NASTY SURPRISE AWAITS THEM.

!

Damnation!

Hands up! Don't try to run: We have the castle surrounded!

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER, LED BY HONEYCHURCH, THE SAS CHARGE INTO THE BASE AND JOIN THE FIGHT.

By Jove, just in time! I was down to my last round!

Well, it seems our lucky star was once again with us. I must admit I'm not sorry to see this story finally reaching its conclusion.

65

IN LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR, IT'S ALL OVER. AS THE PRISONERS ARE TAKEN AWAY, THE BRITISH SCIENTISTS, STILL GROGGY FROM THE DRUG GIVEN TO THEM, ARE CLIMBING BACK TO THE OPEN AIR, WONDERING WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM.

Where on earth is Olrik? I haven't seen him among the prisoners.

There, look!

By the devil, that's him!

That scoundrel! Once again he's slipped through our fingers!

Till we meet again, my masters! And I promise you, on that day you will pay the full price of my revenge!

Will we never be done with that damned colonel!

Bah! We'll get him sooner or later. Come, Philip, there's a car waiting to take us back to London.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, FRESH OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, HOME SECRETARY SIR GEOFFREY BANNISTER HAS GATHERED IN HIS OFFICE THE MAIN ACTORS OF WHAT WILL REMAIN KNOWN AS "THE FRANCIS BLAKE AFFAIR."

Gentlemen, your adventure has shown that if there are, unfortunately, always rogues in this world willing to sell their honour for sordid reasons, there will also always be, and in greater numbers I hope, men and women devoted to their ideals and ready for any sacrifice, that mankind's most sacred gift may triumph: freedom! Captain Francis Blake, Professor Philip Mortimer, for your courage and the immense service rendered unto your country, it is Her Very Gracious Majesty's pleasure to award you the Victoria Cross. God save the Queen and England!

God save the Queen

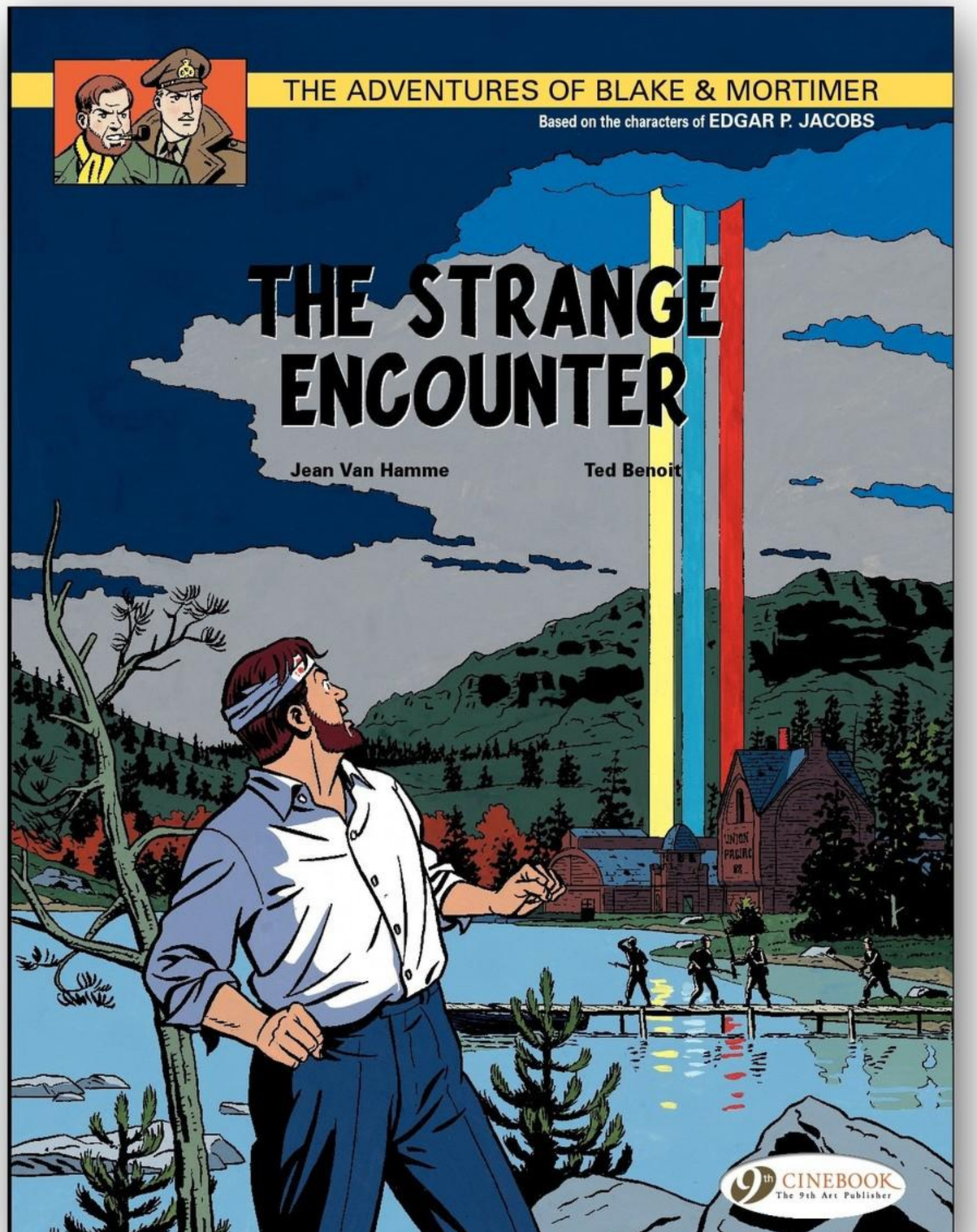
God save the Queen

God save the Queen

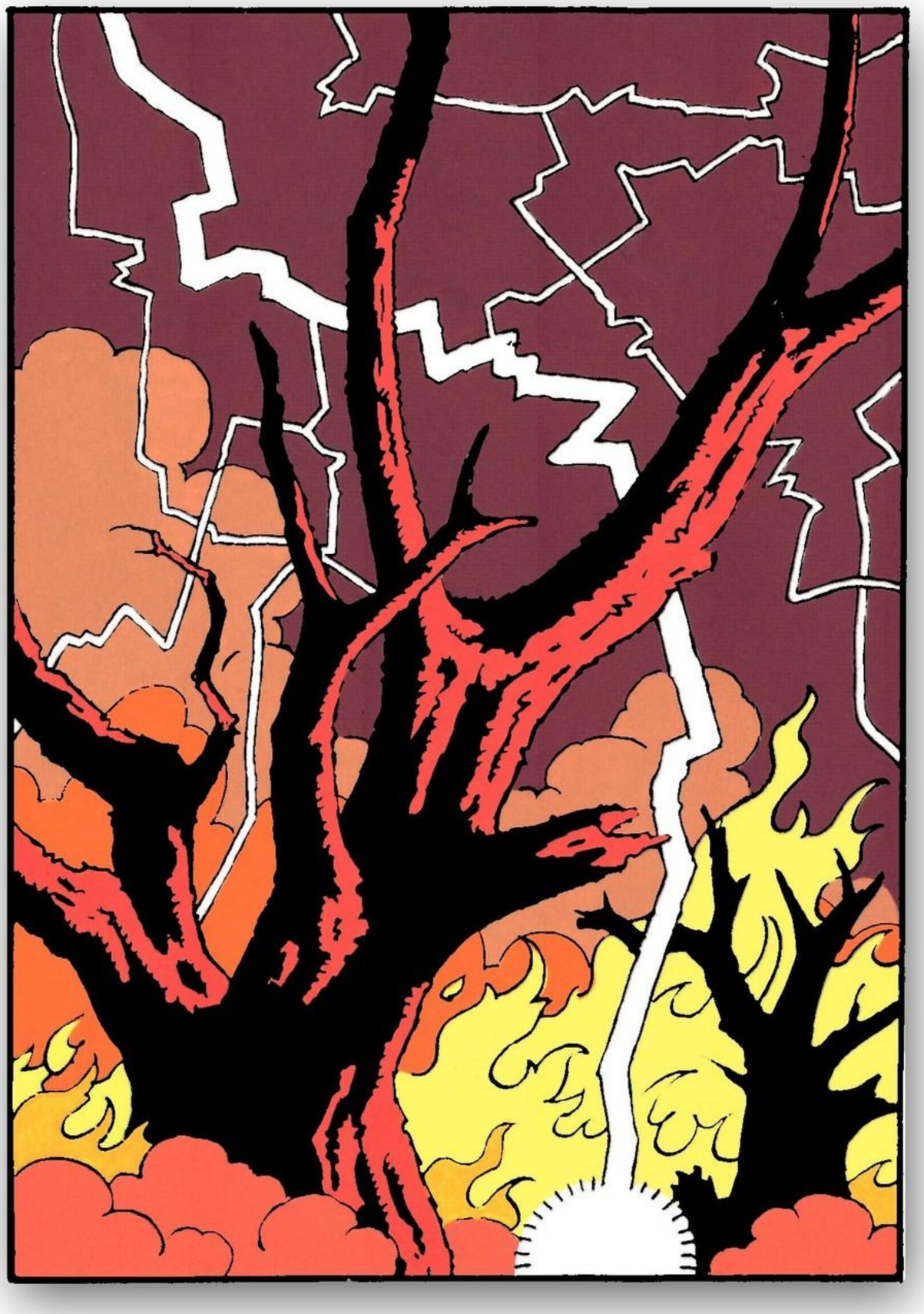
THE END

THE END

JANUARY 2009



WHEN EXTREME WEATHER THREATENS EUROPE,
MORTIMER IS CALLED TO THE RESCUE BY
THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT.



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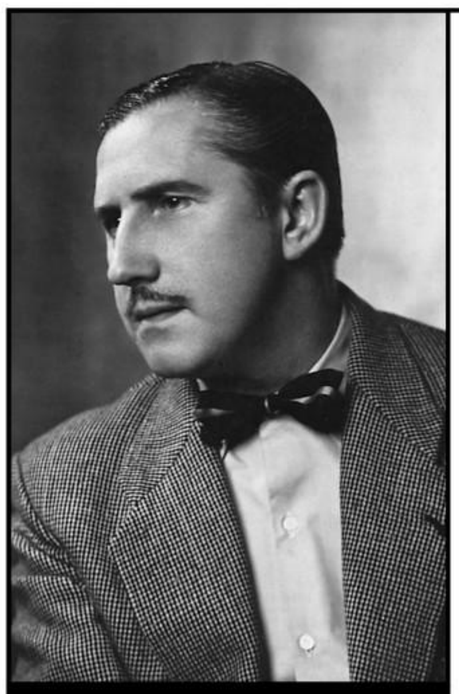

EDGAR P. JACOBS - 1946

1959 - 2009
50TH ANNIVERSARY
S.O.S. METEORS
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Edgar P. Jacobs

S.O.S. METEORS

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn*/*Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls*/*Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.

Volumes published in the Blake and Mortimer series:

1. 1950 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
2. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
3. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
4. 1954 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1*: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1 — **Cinebook N°2 - 2007**
5. 1955 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2*: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2 — **Cinebook N°3 - 2008**
6. 1956 - *La Marque Jaune*: The Yellow "M" — **Cinebook N°1 - 2007**
7. 1957 - *L'Énigme de l'Atlantide*: Atlantis Mystery
8. 1959 - *S.O.S. Météores*: S.O.S. Meteors
9. 1962 - *Le Piège diabolique*: The Time Trap
10. 1967 - *L'Affaire du Collier*: The Necklace Affair
11. 1971 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Sato, T1*: Professor Sató's Three Formulas, Part 1
12. 1990 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Sato, T2*: Professor Sató's Three Formulas, Part 2
13. 1996 - *L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)*: The Francis Blake Affair — **Cinebook N°4 - 2008**
14. 2000 - *La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)*: The Voronov Plot
15. 2001 - *L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)*: The Strange Encounter
16. 2003 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)*: The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
17. 2004 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)*: The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
18. 2008 - *Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)*: The Gondwana Shrine